# The New REPUBLIC

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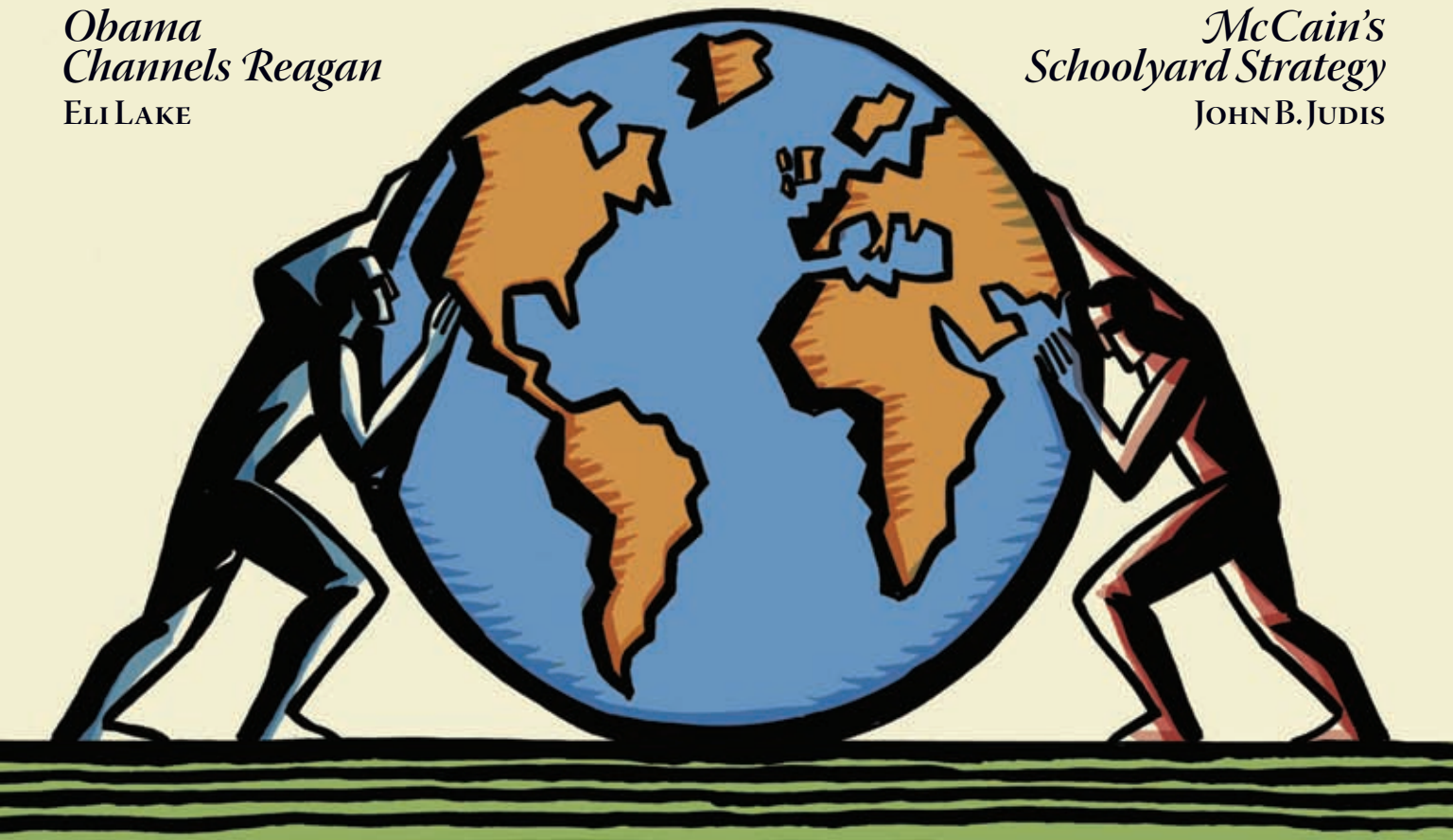
## HOW THEY'D RULE THE WORLD

*Obama Channels Reagan*
ELI LAKE

*McCain's Schoolyard Strategy*
JOHN B. JUDIS



THE LEFT'S NEW GODDESS
Jonathan Chait

THE HIGH PRIEST *of the* McCAIN CULT
Michael Crowley

*Plus*
Leon Wieseltier *on* GOLDEN BULL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THE NEW REPUBLIC

*A Journal of Politics and the Arts*

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# Flipping Out

So Obama will listen to his generals and consider the facts on the ground before fully withdrawing from Iraq. OMG! WTF? Rick Klein of ABC News exclaimed, "There's been lots of speculation this week about whether Barack Obama has an Iraq problem. He does now." *Time*'s Mark Halperin told Anderson Cooper, "This is one of the biggest things that's happened so far in the general election."

Yes, it's stop-the-presses enormous: Barack Obama has affirmed a position that he has held for months. Granted, the press was right to notice that Obama had shifted the accent in his Iraq talk—no doubt marketing himself to a broader audience. But the fine print of his pronouncements and policy papers has always contained nuances and caveats, reasons why he might slow down a pullout and keep troops in Iraq over a longer horizon. In May, Michael Crowley wrote about these provisos in our pages (see "Barack in Iraq," May 7).

Even when Obama delivered his first major speech calling for withdrawal, in November 2006, he hedged:

> I am not suggesting this timetable be overly rigid. . . . The redeployment could be temporarily suspended if the parties in Iraq reach an effective political arrangement that stabilizes the situation and offers us a clear and compelling rationale for maintaining current troop levels. . . . In such a scenario, it is conceivable that a significantly reduced U.S. force might remain in Iraq for a more extended period of time.

What's more, he has always left open the possibility that his administration would leave a substantial number of troops on the ground to guard our embassy, train the Iraqi army, and combat Al Qaeda. And, even though he didn't regularly spell out these wrinkles during the primary, he did routinely say, "We should be as careful getting out of Iraq as we were careless getting in." In fact, he never went nearly so far as Hillary Clinton in unconditionally casting his lot with withdrawal. Therefore, it is ludicrous for journalists only now to appreciate these nuances of his position—and even crazier for them to equate his emphasis of these nuances with flip-flopping.

That flip-flopping has become the most damning accusation against a politician speaks to the poverty of the political process. Here's how the system currently works: As candidates prepare to enter the race, they devise a foreign policy platform. Then, for the next two years, they must resolutely defend that platform. Any deviation from their original position papers will be treated by their opponents—and, in turn, by the press—as a deep character flaw, evidence that a candidate will do whatever it takes to win the presidency.

This is the fate that befell John Kerry, and it's a particularly mindless dynamic. Foreign affairs, especially ongoing wars, are filled with twists and turns, many of which couldn't possibly be predicted years out. Consider all the potential shifts that might take place within Iraq in the next six months: The Iraqi government could demand that the United States head for the exits; Iran could exact revenge for an Israeli strike by launching a wave of suicide attacks; the Iraqi sects could construct a new framework that moves the country substantially closer to political reconciliation. Nobody has a perfect record predicting the course of events in Iraq—and it's absurd that candidates should be rewarded for sticking to stances conceived so long ago.

And, while Obama has clearly reframed his Iraq position with an eye toward November, he also has good substantive reasons for backing away from some of his past rhetoric. The improvements within Iraq are real. Although they may not presage a liberal democracy or justify the permanent presence of our troops, Obama would be a fool if he didn't take these new trends into account. The dynamic within Iraq has changed since he initially conceived his policy during the bloodiest days of sectarian warfare. And there's certainly no reason why he should be rewarded for continuing to argue his Iraq stance as if nothing is different.

All in all, the recent flaying of Barack Obama makes for a depressing object lesson in how our press and our political discourse treat nuance. If Obama, as we've been told, suddenly has a "problem" on Iraq, it's only because American politics has a much deeper one.

David Cowles



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## Harare Show

On June 27, Robert Mugabe got exactly what he wanted: another term as president of Zimbabwe. No matter that he had to chop, bully, and cheat his way to uncontested victory by forcing rival Morgan Tsvangirai to withdraw from the race under the credible threat of violence; within days of the tainted tally, Mugabe was hanging out with fellow African leaders in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm El Sheik. There, the dictator's spokesman offered the following—presumably sarcastic—reply to suggestions that it might be time for his boss to go: "With only five days in office, you expect him to retire?"

Witty! Except the humor may be lost on the beleaguered people of Zimbabwe, who are in their twenty-eighth year under Mugabe's thumb and now face the prospect of remaining there a while longer.

What can other countries do to help? They could start by avoiding embarrassing spectacles of the sort that unfolded in Sharm El Sheik, where Mugabe was allowed to take part in an African Union summit, with all the legitimacy that confers. Some African countries—in particular Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia—have taken an admirably tough line on Mugabe, but too many others have stayed largely mum on the subject. Especially disgraceful has been South African President Thabo Mbeki, who has refused to so much as condemn Mugabe, let alone take active steps to undermine his rule.

As for the West, small signals of solidarity with the Zimbabwean people—like a recent pledge by a German company to stop printing the country's currency—certainly can't hurt. (Not that the money—which suffers from 1 million percent inflation—was worth much anyway, though perhaps Mugabe will now find it that much harder to pay his goons in the military and police forces.) But, ultimately, a solution for Zimbabwe means empowering the rightful winners of the election, Tsvangirai and his Movement for Democratic Change. As *The New York Sun* has suggested, world leaders should officially recognize Tsvangirai as Zimbabwe's president, then bar Mugabe's representatives from the United Nations. And Tsvangirai, along with his shadow cabinet, should be invited to visit Washington for a high-profile meeting with President Bush. None of this, of course, is likely to force Mugabe from office immediately, but at least it would send a message to the African dictator that the world no longer acknowledges his rule. And that, yes, we expect him to retire. ◆

### DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Owing to an editor's error, the caption in "Hedonic Man" (July 9) misstated that Jeremy Bentham's embalmed body is on display at the British Museum. It is actually on display at University College London. We regret the error.

AFP PHOTO/DESMOND KWANDE/NEWSCOM


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energy technology series

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In a lab in Texas, a 57-year-old scientist named Pat Brant has done an amazing thing. Brant and a global team of colleagues developed a new technology that will help hybrid vehicles to run on lithium-ion batteries — the same type of batteries that power today's cell phones and laptops.

Together with other battery advances, it's a breakthrough that could help put more hybrid and electric vehicles on the road.

Brant is a father of four daughters and a lifelong runner. He is also chief polymer scientist at ExxonMobil Chemical Company, where he has worked for 26 years. "I think this is the most important project that I've worked on in my career," he says.

Lithium-ion batteries are lightweight, and have high energy and power capacity. But they so far have not been used broadly in hybrid vehicles. One reason: when a lithium-ion battery's scale is increased to the size necessary to power a vehicle, its plastic film separator (which protects against short-circuiting and overheating) must function under more demanding conditions.

Using hydrocarbon-based polymers, Brant and his global colleagues developed a new film separator that can withstand more demanding hybrid-vehicle battery conditions.

"It's a true breakthrough that can help deploy more hybrid vehicles faster," says Brant. Hybrid vehicles use less fuel, and emit fewer greenhouse gases, than traditional vehicles. If 10 percent of the cars in the United States were hybrid-electric vehicles, the resulting carbon-dioxide reductions would be equivalent to taking five million cars off the road.

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# Old Flame

*Why I still kinda like John McCain.*

JONATHAN CHAIT

THE PRESIDENTIAL election has an oddly placid feel to it. Four years ago, the notion that George W. Bush would get another four years in office, actually ratified by a plurality of the voters, was more than any liberal could bear, and, after the election, there was loose talk everywhere about "Jesusland" and wanting to flee to Canada. This time, even though Democrats are extremely enthusiastic about Barack Obama, that life-and-death quality is absent. I think the reason is that a lot of liberals kind of like John McCain. I know I do.

Eight years ago, I was a hard-core liberal McCainiac. Here was a Republican saying things no other Republican would say and fighting, Teddy Roosevelt–style, to wrest his party from the hands of the plutocrats who controlled it. And, in the years immediately following that run, McCain established himself as perhaps the country's foremost progressive champion. He was an opponent, on moral and fiscal grounds, of tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefited the rich. He was also a fierce opponent of the extreme elements of the religious right. He was a proponent of global-warming legislation, the Law of the Sea Treaty, a moderate immigration bill, expanded public financing of elections, a tobacco tax, and many other liberal reforms.

Today, he is none of these things. McCain is almost never asked about his scandalous past. On those rare occasions when he is, he either dissembles (claiming to have opposed tax cuts on the grounds that there were no concurrent spending cuts) or interrupts the questioning with an angry outburst (in response to queries about his reportedly extended discussions about joining John Kerry's 2004 ticket). Today, McCain not only claims not to have altered his views for political convenience, he has preposterously made his alleged refusal to do so the central theme of his campaign.

Yet, somehow, I still feel some pangs of affinity for the old codger. Where Bush is peevish, entitled, and insecure, McCain's charming, ironic, and self-deprecating. Bush's path to public life was trading on his father's name to run a series of business ventures into the ground before being handed a baseball team. McCain's was an episode of awe-inspiring perseverance.

Yes, people put far too much stock in the candidates' personalities. (I'd vote for an obnoxious, pampered phony who shared my beliefs over a charming war hero who didn't.) But personality isn't completely meaningless, either. A president sets the tone for our public discourse, and McCain is pretty easy to take. His demagoguery comes with an awkward forced smile, which doesn't make it more forgivable but does make it less irritating.

As for his substantive views, they do (now) closely resemble Bush's. Yet the upside to a candidate who changes his philosophical orientation as often as McCain is that he could always switch back. While I certainly wouldn't recommend that anybody go so far as to *vote* for him on that basis, it still offers some grounds for hope. The Bush presidency is like being married to a sociopath. A McCain presidency would be more like being married to a drug addict—however badly he behaves, he could always sober up.

McCain's most longstanding conservative principle is his aversion to wasteful spending. But this has always sprung from an aversion to waste, not a Goldwater-esque opposition to government in principle. McCain's reformist impulses on spending are far more congenial to the progressive vision. If nothing else, his longstanding repugnance for pork-barrel spending would hold out the prospect of clearing away waste in the federal budget. McCain voted against the subsidy-bloated 2003 Medicare prescription drug bill. He nobly opposes the farm bill, one of the few issues where McCain has a sensible position and Obama does not. If McCain could actually trim some corporate welfare from the budget, it would create more fiscal and political space for the next Democratic president to spend money on necessary things like health care.

The best aspect of a McCain presidency is that, while it would probably follow the policies of George W. Bush, it would put an end to the politics of Karl Rove. I went back and reread Michael Lewis's 1997 *New York Times Magazine* profile of McCain, which gushed (persuasively) over McCain long before McCain-gushing had become a media cliché. You can see in it that, even before his first presidential campaign made him persona non grata in the GOP, McCain really was a highly bipartisan figure. The article cites McCain working unusually closely with Democrats, and quotes Democrats lavishing praise on him. He impugns his own party's leadership as corrupt. He jokingly refers to his younger political self as a "freshman right-wing Nazi." Conservative ideologues, as a rule, do not liken conservatism to national socialism.

Liberals tend to view the press's love affair with McCain as a wildly unfair act of bias. They have a point. On the other hand, they should take some heart in the fact that McCain obviously cherishes the approval of the mainstream (and even liberal) media. His accessibility to the press and public is something small-d democrats should cheer. McCain has conducted interviews with very liberal publications like *Grist*. He's promised to undertake an American version of "Prime Minister's Questions," whereby members of Congress could spar with him.

Does McCain spin and dissemble? Of course. But the current administration's practices go far beyond mere spin. In Bush's Washington, critics are enemies to be dismissed rather than engaged. A McCain presidency would promise to dismantle the whole Rovian method that has torn open such a deep wound in the national psyche.

Beneath his wildly fluctuating ideological positions, McCain is an establishmentarian Republican. Unlike Bush, he cares about elite opinion. He is comfortable sharing power in the traditional postwar style rather than monopolizing it. He might not be another Teddy Roosevelt, but right now another Gerald Ford doesn't look so bad.

The idea that McCain could establish a reputation as a maverick by standing up to his party on numerous issues, win back his party's support by abandoning nearly all his heterodoxies, then prevail by portraying himself as an unwavering man of principle is nauseating. Yet somehow the idea of a McCain presidency itself doesn't terrify me. What can I say? Bush has lowered my standards. ◆

## TRB
### *From Washington*



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# The Mall

## Con Law

*What the University of Chicago right thinks of Obama.*

In the spring of 2000, not long after Barack Obama was trounced in the Democratic primary for a South Side Chicago congressional seat, Daniel Fischel staged an intervention. Meeting with Obama in the main lounge at the University of Chicago Law School, where Fischel was then dean and Obama was a part-time senior lecturer, Fischel offered Obama some unsolicited advice. "I told him that it was obvious his political career was going nowhere," Fischel recalls, "and that he really ought to think about doing something else."

The particular "something else" Fischel had in mind was a full-time tenured professorship; to sweeten the offer, Fischel said the law school would even hire Obama's wife, Michelle, to run its legal clinic. Although the move would require Obama to give up his state Senate seat, Fischel tried to convince his junior colleague that Chicago professor might be a more natural role than Chicago politician for a cerebral guy like him. "I mentioned people who'd been faculty members like [Antonin] Scalia and [Richard] Posner and [Frank] Easterbrook and many others who had gone on to very distinguished careers outside of academia or in combination with academia," Fischel says. "I told him he could be a faculty member as well as a public intellectual."

Obama declined Fischel's overture, saying that he wanted to give elected politics another shot. And today, of course, it's hard to find any fault with the wisdom of that decision. Still, the episode is interesting not only as a counterfactual (how much does Hillary Clinton wish Obama had spent last December grading Con Law exams instead of stumping in Iowa?) but as a window onto Obama's relationship with those who don't share his ideology. The University of Chicago Law School, after all, is a famously conservative institution—the birthplace of the law-and-economics movement and the incubator of numerous conservative intellectuals; Fischel himself literally wrote (with Easterbrook) one of the fundamental books on law and economics, in addition to another book arguing that the government's prosecution of Michael Milken was unjust. Yet, eight years ago, there was something about Obama that made Fischel and other Chicago conservative legal scholars want Obama to be their colleague—and today, at least for some of them, maybe even their president.

Obama first came to the University of Chicago Law School's attention via one of its more celebrated conservative faculty members, Michael McConnell, who's now a federal judge on the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals and reportedly was on George W. Bush's short list of potential Supreme Court nominees. Back in 1990, when McConnell was still teaching at Chicago, he wrote an article about church-state relations for the *Harvard Law Review* that Obama, who was then the *Law Review*'s president, edited. As McConnell recently recalled the experience to *Politico*: "A frequent problem with student editors is that they try to turn an article into something they want it to be. It was striking that Obama didn't do that. He tried to make it better from my point of view." McConnell was so impressed with Obama that he recommended him to the head of Chicago's appointments committee at the

*"Question my patriotism again and you'll get the foreign object."*



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time, Douglas Baird, a bankruptcy expert and a law-and-economics devotee. "Michael's a very smart guy who's basically a very good judge of horse flesh—he wouldn't typically recommend people," says Baird.

Baird approached Obama about a teaching job at Chicago during his third and final year as a student at Harvard. "You look at his background—*Harvard Law Review* president, magna cum laude, and he's African American," Baird says. "This is a no-brainer hiring decision at the entry level of any law school in the country." But Obama wasn't interested. Obama did, however, mention that he was writing a book on voting rights, so Baird arranged for him to become a Law and Government Fellow at the school—a position that provided Obama with an office and a modest stipend he could use in the course of his writing. When Obama came to Baird in the middle of his fellowship to report that his book on voting rights had morphed into the memoir that would become *Dreams From My Father*, Baird told him not to worry. "It was a good deal for us," Baird explains, "because he was a good teaching prospect and we wanted him around." Indeed, after the publication of *Dreams*, Baird, who was then dean of the law school, took another shot at hiring Obama as a professor. Obama, who was in the midst of successfully running for the state Senate, once again declined. But he did accept the law school's offer to become a senior lecturer—then a title held only by Posner and Easterbrook—and teach a reduced course load of three classes per year.

For the next eight years, Obama taught upper-level constitutional law courses on equal protection and voting rights. He was a huge hit with his students. According to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, which reviewed students' evaluations of Obama's courses, he was almost always rated one of their favorite instructors during his time at Chicago. Given the subject matter of Obama's courses, one might assume that students in the classes—which were electives—would have been disproportionately liberal. But Chicago's reputation for producing law professors tended to mitigate against that. "Anybody who's thinking they want to go into academia, conservative or liberal, kind of knows they have to take equal protection," says Kenworthey Bilz, who took equal protection from Obama in 1997 and is now a professor at Northwestern Law School. "I can very confidently say he didn't strike me as liberal or conservative."

Because of his political duties in Springfield, Obama scheduled most of his classes on Monday mornings and Friday afternoons—before or after the weekends he'd spend with his family in Chicago—which meant he rarely participated in the law school's famous faculty seminars and workshops. This caused a little grumbling among some of his colleagues. "He was at the law school but not of the law school, like Posner and Easterbrook," says Richard Epstein, the famously libertarian law professor. "He's not someone who came to lunch when the topic wasn't one of his choosing." But other faculty said Obama made contributions outside the classroom in other ways. Obama was particularly good at "bonding with students and being a forceful mentor with students," says Baird. "The hours he kept tended to be different. Frank Easterbrook doesn't get up before ten o'clock, where Barack would be there at eight o'clock. Students could have a cup of coffee with him at eight o'clock, and many did."

Obama's closest colleagues at the law school tended to be the more liberal members of the faculty—such as Cass Sunstein and Geoffrey Stone—but many conservatives were fond of him, even though they often didn't see eye to eye. Saul Levmore, the school's current dean, whose politics are hard to characterize but generally right-leaning, says, "We were intensely interested in him. We were looking for him to say, 'I'm giving up politics, I want to be an academic.' We were always in recruiting mode with him." Epstein, who once almost sold his Hyde Park home to Obama and would buttonhole him to talk about things like state mandates for health insurance, offers one reason why: "He was always a terrific listener. He'd sit there and cock his head, take it all in."

Of course, as Epstein points out, Obama's willingness to listen didn't necessarily mean he was willing to be convinced. "What you don't get, alas and alack, out of all this is a change in point of view," Epstein says. "If you ask me whether I had any influence on his intellectual or moral development, I'd say no, not even a little."

But other Chicago conservatives seem content with the fact that Obama tried to understand their point of view, even if he didn't wind up adopting it. "What I know from my dealings with him at the law school is that he does really attempt to understand the points of view of other people who look at the world or a particular issue differently than he does," says Fischel. "He's much more intellectual, much more thoughtful, much more interested in discussion, debate, and dialogue than the typical politician. And that gives me some confidence about him, even though from my perspective he's much too liberal. I've never voted for a Democrat in my entire life. He's the first one I might vote for."

*Jason Zengerle*

**WHO'S CASHING IN THIS WEEK?**

## *Karen Hughes and Mark Penn*

She orchestrated p.r. for that triumph, the Iraq war. He conceived the strategy that drove that juggernaut, the Hillary Clinton campaign—and managed to earn the enmity of key Democratic constituencies by also selling his services to the Colombian government and anti-union companies during the primary. Now Hughes has hopped aboard the good ship Penn: The two plan to hawk their one-stop-crisis-communications services to the corporate world for his firm Burson-Marsteller. Based on their track record, they should have a compelling slogan: "Oh yes, we know crisis."

*Dayo Olopade*

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## Single-Minded

*The left's overeager health care reformers.*

If you are one of those people who believes the government, rather than for-profit corporations, should provide all Americans with health insurance, then you haven't had much trouble finding evidence to support your view. "Single-payer" systems, as these schemes are known, don't fritter money away on marketing, profits, and the constant efforts insurers make to enroll only healthy, cheap-to-insure customers. Single-payer systems also offer free choice of doctor and hospital, a privilege your typical managed-care enrollee covets. Most important of all, the people who get insurance from single-payer systems seem to be rather happy. Just go ask the citizens of France, who enjoy a system that combines legendary convenience with cutting-edge cancer care. Or, closer to home, ask a senior citizen: Medicare, which covers virtually every American 65 and over, is a single-payer system of sorts; it is also, according to surveys, far more popular with its enrollees than private insurers are with theirs.

But, if you were hoping that Washington would take your views seriously, then you've probably been pretty disappointed. The votes for creating a single-payer system just don't exist on Capitol Hill. So, when Washington gets serious about reforming the nation's health care system, as it is right now, the single-payer crowd inevitably ends up on the margins. You can see it in the press coverage, as reporters, myself included, hype the work of lawmakers like Senator Ron Wyden, who has been pushing a bipartisan bill that would give everybody private insurance. Meanwhile, almost nobody bothers to interview Representative John Conyers, even though his single-payer bill has 90 co-sponsors—not enough to earn it passage, perhaps, but surely enough to earn it a place in the conversation.

For you, then, July 8 should have been a day to celebrate. That's when a coalition of heavyweight liberal organizations, from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to MoveOn.org, launched a campaign on behalf of universal coverage called "Health Care for America Now" (HCAN). With its $40 million budget, HCAN has embraced an agenda that goes well beyond the vague, mealy-mouthed principles typical of such efforts. According to HCAN, simply giving everybody a choice of health insurance plans, as Wyden's and many other mainstream reform proposals would do, isn't enough. It's critical that the choices include a public option—that is, an insurance program run by the federal government.

HCAN's agenda—which isn't a plan per se but a set of principles—doesn't go as far as traditional single-payer advocates would like. Instead of Medicare for All, as single-payer advocates describe their vision, it's Medicare for Anybody Who Wants It. But a scheme like the one HCAN envisions might someday become a true single-payer plan, if the public plan proves more attractive than private alternatives and everybody ends up enrolling in it on their own. And that probably wouldn't bother the scheme's proponents. The most well known is intellectual architect Jacob Hacker, a University of California-Berkeley political scientist (and occasional TNR contributor) who has argued passionately on behalf of universal, government-run programs like Medicare and Social Security. Along with the Campaign for America's Future, a liberal advocacy group that is also the driving force behind HCAN, Hacker talked up his idea to all three of the leading Democratic presidential contenders. Barack Obama not only included an optional public plan in his eventual blueprint for universal coverage; more recently, he also tapped Hacker to be on his campaign's health care advisory committee.

But the best-known advocates for single-payer coverage haven't shown much enthusiasm for this approach. And, when HCAN made its splashy debut, these groups made clear their ambivalence. As part of a daily dispatch from Physicians for a National Health Plan, a group that reports 15,000 members, Don McCanne sent out a statement bemoaning the inclusion of private plans. "Why did the coalition insist on including private plans when the industry's track record is so miserable?" McCanne asked. Another prominent member of the organization, Cambridge physician David Himmelstein, made an even blunter criticism. HCAN, he said, "is pushing a superficially attractive health reform that has a long record of failure—akin to prescribing a placebo for a serious illness when effective treatment is available." Meanwhile, the California Nurses Association, arguably the largest and most effective single-payer lobby out there, registered a similar line of complaint: Writing at *The Huffington Post*, the group's executive director, Rose Ann DeMoro, asked: "Why is Health Care for America Now giving up on real reform?"

Alas, this reaction wasn't surprising—except, perhaps, for its relatively respectful tone. A few months ago, during the Democratic primaries, the California Nurses' national arm launched a high-profile and caustic independent expenditure campaign targeting Hillary Clinton, making similar complaints about her health care plan—even though it, too, had a public insurance option. This time around, the California Nurses offered politic praise of HCAN's nod toward a public program (in part, perhaps, because the Nurses have since endorsed Obama). But it insisted the scheme still wouldn't work. "The insurance companies will always be able to lower their prices with cut rate plans with lower standards that they can aggressively market," Charles Idelson, the communications director, told me. "The upshot is that the private plans will likely be able to cherry-pick the younger and healthier patients while the sicker and older patients end up in the public plan, wrecking the whole idea of a risk pool and driving up the costs for the public plan to operate. The competition won't starve the private plans and cause them to wither away; they'll starve the public plans."

It's a reasonable worry. In the United States, the federal government has managed to maintain Medicare as a relatively vibrant and popular program, despite private competition promoted by conservatives who would just as soon see Medicare vanish. But it's been a constant struggle, one the government has waged only by funding the program adequately and by keeping very close watch over the private competitors, to make sure they don't destabilize Medicare by playing precisely the sorts of games that Idelson describes. For a program like the one HCAN is backing to work, the same thing must happen: Government will need enough money and regulatory power to keep the private plans in line, an idea that is virtually anathema to many conservatives and corporate lobbies, who grasp that a robust public plan might someday cripple the insurance industry.

Countering that free-market faith will require an extraordinary political effort. And the effort must begin now, because a broad, if highly fragile, consensus over how a universal coverage program might work is already emerging. You can see it in Wyden's bill, which has a bona fide conservative champion in Utah

ANTHONY RUSSO



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Senator Bob Bennett and counts six other Republicans among its co-sponsors. But the Wyden-Bennett bill wouldn't offer Americans the option to enroll in a public plan. SEIU president Andy Stern, whose voice on health care carries considerable weight in Washington, thinks the only way to move the consensus and win creation of a public plan option is through a large grassroots effort. And, since single-payer advocates include some of health care's most dedicated activists—the kind willing to spend days knocking on doors, churning out e-mails, and organizing rallies—they could make a real difference. "Their unique role, if they're inclined to do it, is to guarantee the public option that Obama has in his plan, which will be an incredibly hard fight," says Stern.

Even if that crusade ultimately fails, it might tip the political balance enough to make the difference between a strong version of something resembling the Wyden-Bennett bill—say, one with rich benefits and real protections for consumers—and a weak one. But first single-payer advocates would have to embrace impure and, yes, imperfect versions of their ideal health reform. And that's not something for which they've traditionally shown much interest.

During the last great debate over universal coverage, in 1993 and 1994, single-payer advocates wanted nothing to do with a system that dropped so many into private insurance. That lack of enthusiasm was not the only or even the primary reason that the Clinton health care plan failed. But it certainly didn't help that, once critics of the plan went on the attack, the most heartfelt advocates for universal coverage were content to watch the fight from afar.

In this latest debate over universal health insurance, single-payer advocates don't have the same monopoly on passion and commitment they did last time around. But they could still be a significant and most welcome part of this campaign, if only they would enlist.

*JONATHAN COHN*

## Salad Days

*Obama's arugula problem hits home.*

SUPERMARKET POLITICS have always posed perilous risks for presidential candidates. Sure, voters want a candidate with a firm hand on foreign policy and a keen grasp of economics. But, in electoral contests, "you are what you eat" trumps all. In the last presidential election, the Republicans got John Kerry choked up on Chablis. Before

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that, George H.W. Bush, while visiting the National Grocers Association convention during his 1992 reelection bid, got caught in the rays of barcode scanners. "This is for checking out?" he asked, straight-faced. The editors at *The Onion* would have coveted the headline in next day's *New York Times*: BUSH ENCOUNTERS THE SUPERMARKET, AMAZED.

With grocery-store shelves lined with potential p.r. blunders, it's no surprise that Barack Obama's elitism problem looks a lot like, well, arugula. It all started back in July 2007, when he asked a group of farmers in Adel, Iowa, "Anybody gone into Whole Foods lately and see what they charge for arugula?" (To most Americans, Whole Foods might better be called "Whole Paycheck," as one of my friends sniffs.) Then, in May, Obama told supporters at a rally in Roseburg, Oregon, that Americans might not be able to keep eating as much as we'd like. Conservative bloggers were outraged: first salad snobbery, now a diet that the skinny guy would mandate from the Oval Office?

Throughout the campaign, many have looked to Obama's neighborhood, the Hyde Park section of Chicago, as the wellspring for his arugula-attuned taste. At various turns, Obama's hometown has been depicted as a lefty enclave like Cambridge or Berkeley, where University of Chicago professors, upper-middle-class black professionals, and aging radicals like Bill Ayers and his wife, Bernardine Dohrn, get along swimmingly while shopping for environmentally conscious groceries at the Hyde Park co-op. In May, the *Times* ran a front-page piece about Obama's neighborhood, declaring, "For Mr. Obama, who was born in Hawaii to a white Kansan mother and an African father and who spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, it was a perfect fit." And, last month, *The Weekly Standard* devoted 4,000 words to a cover story on the neighborhood that took note of Hyde Park's "alarmingly high number of men wandering about looking like NPR announcers."

When I visited Hyde Park in June, the big scandal that had residents buzzing was the demise of the 76-year-old Hyde Park food co-op, which shuttered its doors this winter. At its closing, it had more than 20,000 members, making it the largest cooperative in the country, though members were not required to staff the store. The ultimate collapse had begun in 2000, when the co-op, seeking to prevent a rival supermarket from moving onto its turf, expanded to a second location. The real-estate deal backfired and plunged the co-op into debt. And, when the University of Chicago offered to bail the co-op out—hoping to turn the space into a gourmet supermarket—all hell broke loose.

On the left, the *Hyde Park Herald* adopted the view of longtime co-op shoppers and residents who harbor angry memories of the university's strong-arm development projects. They railed that the yuppie academics and their capitalist collaborators had cooked up a campaign to dupe the community into selling out. Their anti-corporate attitude was at least in part a by-product of the university's efforts during the 1950s to push back the slums encroaching from the south and west. The university demolished slums under the guise of "urban renewal" and expelled many of the area's independent merchants, jazz bars, and restaurants that had catered to the surrounding black communities. With its isolated location and population of cash-strapped grad students, Hyde Park failed to recruit modern chain stores to replace them, leaving the main shopping thoroughfare along 53rd Street a jangle of abandoned storefronts, a dollar store, and a check-cashing shop. "The University wanted the Hyde Park Co-op grocery gone—seventy-five years of neighborhood history and the feelings of the thousands of Hyde Park families not withstanding," a *Herald* editorial trilled last December.

But the co-op also had detractors that included, not surprisingly, professors and the wealthy North Side professionals who increasingly settled in Hyde Park to send their children to the prestigious and private Laboratory School, where the Obama children go. To them, there was little sentimental value to the co-op, which they criticized as overpriced and short on selection. "Whenever I went to the co-op, my view was this thing is



DAVID COWLES

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real expensive, the food isn't that good, there's hardly any selection," Obama's economic adviser and newly minted Hyde Park resident, Austan Goolsbee, told me. "I know some people are upset, but, truly, for a lot of people, this is a great gettin'-up day for Hyde Park!" *The Chicago Maroon*, an independent student newspaper, pushed for the co-op to get lost. "The Co-Op was a terrible store. It had been poorly run for nearly a decade; of course it should close," one columnist wrote in January. My cousin, a grad student at the University, told me he and his friends preferred to skip the co-op and drive to the Trader Joe's on the north side, about 20 minutes away.

Hippie co-opers? Yuppie snobs? Obama can hardly afford to be in the company of either group. Still, it's probably the case that, from a purely calculated electoral point of view, the only thing worse than arugula is *socialist* arugula. And, in that, Obama has caught a lucky break: This winter, Treasure Island, a popular Chicago grocery chain, moved into the co-op's former location. Then again, the sign on the storefront heralds the store's arrival in bold block lettering: AMERICA'S MOST EUROPEAN SUPERMARKET.

GABRIEL SHERMAN

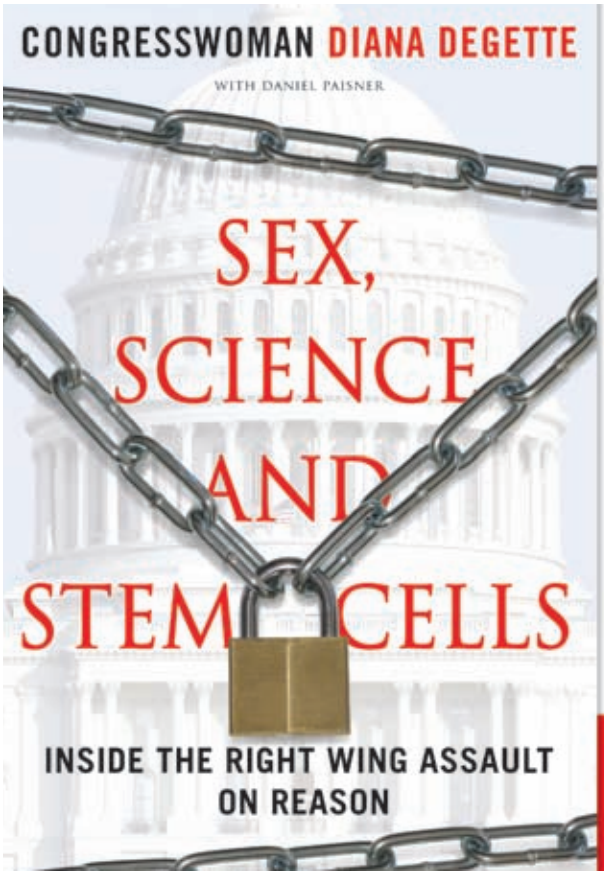
## Stirring the Pot

*Will Israel bomb its way to the table?*

ISRAELI POLITICIANS have suggested for years that they might attack Iran, but, lately, they seem to be dropping more hints than usual. At the beginning of June, Israel's deputy prime minister, Shaul Mofaz, flatly told the Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* that, if Iran continues its nuclear program, Israel "will attack it." Mofaz's comments struck many observers as more political than substantial—one of the things an ambitious Israeli leader does to bolster his odds of becoming the next prime minister. But the current prime minister, Ehud Olmert, was also fairly blunt when he spoke in Washington around the same time: "Israel," he said, "will not tolerate the possibility of a nuclear Iran." And, this week, Defense Minister Ehud Barak sounded a similarly tough note on the Iranian question. While saying that "the focus now is sanctions and diplomatic action," he added that "Israel is the strongest country in the region, and it has proven in the past that it is not afraid to act when its vital interests are threatened." Meanwhile, last month, the Israeli air force conducted a substantial military exercise in the Mediterranean, one that looked suspiciously like a dry run for an attack on Iran. No wonder many are convinced that the Israelis are seriously considering an attack—among them, anonymous American "defense officials," whom ABC News recently paraphrased as warning of a "possibility that Israel may attack Iran's nuclear facilities within the year."

What has apparently persuaded so many Israeli politicians that an attack on Iran might be the only available course of action? There are a number of factors; but one of them, oddly enough, may be a faith in the power of diplomacy.

TODAY, ISRAELIS are convinced that the world is preparing to live with a nuclear Iran. Everyone, from the prime minister on down, agrees that Iran has not been made to feel the bite of real sanctions—at least not to an extent that would change its behavior. The U.S. National Intelligence Estimate published late last year—which argued that Iran had suspended its nuclear program—was widely dismissed in Israel as evidence that the U.S. defense establishment was now inclined to turn the other way as Iran pursued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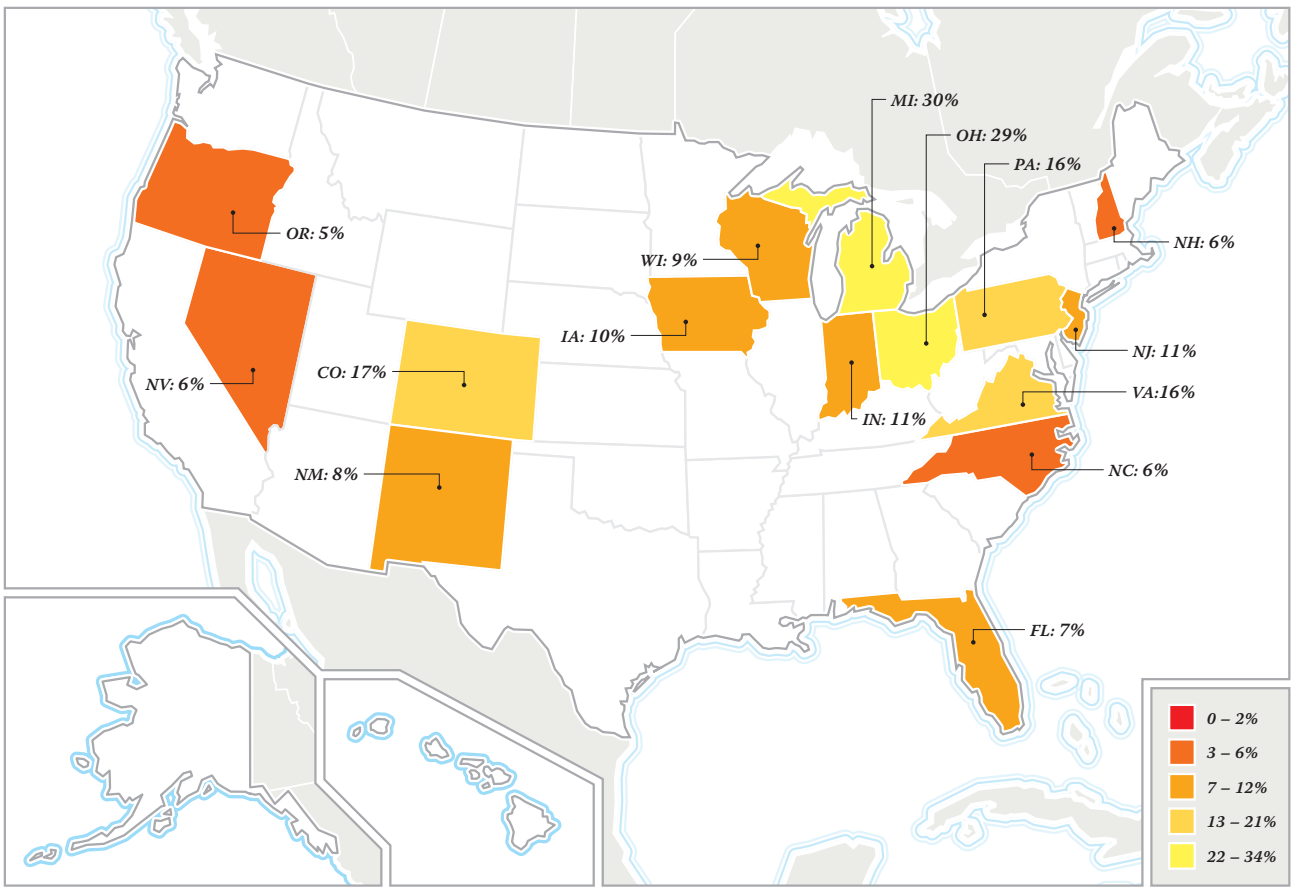
its nuclear ambitions. More recently, Israelis listened carefully to the words of President Bush on his June European tour when he said that he expected to "leave behind a multilateral framework to work on this issue." Bush used a similar formulation six weeks ago when I interviewed him in the Oval Office. Asked what can be achieved on the Iranian front before he leaves office, the president said, "I think what definitely will be done is a structure on how to deal with this . . . a framework to make sure other countries are involved."

Israelis hear "framework" and run to their shelters. Faced with an existential threat, they need prevention, not a framework. Moreover, as the world learned in 1981 when Israel's attack on Osirak (the Iraqi nuclear reactor) generated howls of disapproval from the Reagan administration, Israel does not always abide by an American desire for restraint.

The lesson of 1981 is relevant for another reason: While that attack is seen in Israel as an unqualified success, there is evidence that it convinced Saddam Hussein to redouble his efforts to build nuclear weapons. That is why, in a new paper about the possible consequences of an attack on Iran, Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy treat the bombing of Osirak more critically. The point they are making is simple: Postponing Iran's achievements might not be enough. The most important measure of success for any military strike is "whether or not Iran decides to rebuild." And this will be determined not by the results of the military act alone, but by what comes after the attack—the

## THE TIPPING-POINT STATES

The *FiveThirtyEight.com* election simulator identifies "Tipping-Point States": states that would be most likely to alter the outcome of a close election. More specifically, they are the closest states—alone or in combination—that would give the losing candidate at least 270 electoral votes if transferred from the winner's column. Consider: John McCain won't win Minnesota without having won Wisconsin, and he won't win Wisconsin without having won Michigan—and if he's won Michigan and Wisconsin, he's the next president. So Minnesota isn't as important as it might appear. The figures on the map show the percentage of times in 10,000 simulated elections that a certain state was the Tipping-Point State. The conclusion: Michigan and Ohio are most likely to tip the election. Which makes sense: They are very middle-of-the-road states, not just politically, but also demographically. If Barack Obama is to pull off winning Indiana or Missouri, say, he will probably have had to win Ohio and Michigan first—or likewise for John McCain in Pennsylvania. *Nate Silver*



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regional power struggle, the reaction of the international community, and perhaps even the talks that could lead to eventual compromise.

If that is the case—if the follow-up will determine the outcome more than the level of destruction that a strike can achieve—then Israel might not feel so constrained by the relative size of its air force (compared with America's) and the relative complexity of the target (compared with Osirak). According to this line of thinking, which has adherents among some high-ranking officials and former officials in the Israeli defense establishment, focusing on the tactical questions surrounding such an operation—how much of Iran's nuclear program can Israel destroy? how many years can a bombing campaign set the program back?—is a mistake. The main goal of a hit would not be to destroy the program completely, but rather to awaken the international community from its slumber and force it to finally engineer a solution to the crisis. As one former Israeli official put it, any attack on Iran's reactors—as long as it is not perceived as a military failure—can serve as a means of "stirring the pot" of international geopolitics. Israel, in other words, wouldn't be resorting to military action because it is convinced that diplomacy by the international community cannot stop Iran; it would be resorting to military action because *only* diplomacy by the international community can stop Iran.

Very few Israeli officials will discuss the matter in detail, but some are willing to explain the basic logic behind this thinking. (For most of them, it is one reason among many why they think an attack could be a good idea.) Bombing Iran would be "one way to reverse the trend of inaction," says a knowledgeable Israeli official, "and, as time goes by without anyone else willing to force the international community into meaningful action, Israel will have to consider if it's willing to take the risk and do it."

If the goal of an Israeli attack would be to get the world's attention, that probably won't be hard to achieve. Consider that, the day of Mofaz's explosive comments on Iran, gas prices around the world soared. And, two weeks later, when news broke that Israel had staged a large-scale military operation that looked like a dress rehearsal for an attack on Iran, gas prices went up again. If mere words were cause for such anxiety in the gas markets, imagine what an actual Israeli attack, even one limited in scope, will do.

AP PHOTO/ARIEL SCHALIT

*Where will the Israeli air force take its show next?*

As one former Israeli defense official admits, bombing Iran merely to get the world's attention carries serious risks. It will probably result in Iranian retaliation, and a costly one for that matter. Meanwhile, the former official predicts, many world leaders will be furious and will "look for ways to punish Israel for its deeds."

But, as far as Israel is concerned, it is running out of time—and options—to stop Iran from getting the bomb. And letting Iran acquire nuclear capability would, at this point, be a double disaster for Israel. Not only would Iran have a new and terrible weapon, but Israel's pledges to stop the country from going nuclear would have been proven hollow. This could embolden the Iranians even more. Thus, the more Israel pledges to stop Iran, the more it becomes necessary to deliver. And, if the rest of the world won't do its part, then "stirring the pot"—however imperfect a strategy—may increasingly strike Israeli leaders as their least bad move. *Shmuel Rosner*

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*Shmuel Rosner is chief U.S. correspondent for Haaretz. He blogs daily at www.rosnersdomain.com.*



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# Contra Expectations

*Obama isn't Jimmy Carter—he's Ronald Reagan.*

ELI LAKE

On his first day in office, President Barack Obama will head to the situation room for a video conference with his most important commander, General David Petraeus. If the conversation is chilly, it is not just the awkwardness of virtual chatting. Obama and Petraeus have a history. While Obama has called for withdrawing U.S. forces from Iraq, Petraeus oversaw the deployment of more than 30,000 additional troops. To win support from the left, Obama postured as a skeptic of the general's Iraq strategy during congressional hearings. Meanwhile, Petraeus has emerged as something of a hero to the right—and, despite his protestations, might someday run for president as a Republican.

But, more than any campaign rhetoric or past slights, the relationship between the general and his commander-in-chief will hinge on much larger questions about Barack Obama and the war on terrorism.

And, while it's easy to dismiss the conservative critique of Obama's foreign policy as a politically motivated caricature, you can see why McCain supporters have tried to tag him as a latter-day Jimmy Carter. During the primaries, Obama talked about the war on terrorism with the fastidiousness of a civil libertarian—emphasizing the constraints that he would impose on our military and CIA and rarely mentioning specific methods for prosecuting it. He has, for instance, talked extensively about closing the Guantánamo Bay prison and ending the policy of extraordinary rendition.

There are arguably many moral and strategic reasons for this agenda. But the insights gleaned from the counterinsurgency in Iraq and seven years of fighting Al Qaeda across the world also yield harsher lessons. American national interests often demand collaboration with security forces, militias, and tribal leaders who don't conform to our highest ideals. What's more, a key plank of the Petraeus strategy in Iraq is to isolate and shrink the pool of irreconcilable insurgents. That means in practice paying off former bomb-makers, torturers, and terrorists to entice them to join the fight against Al Qaeda—and these are, needless to say, not the types to fret over the nuances of the Geneva Conventions. Or, as one former Sunni insurgent turned ally in Fallujah told *The Washington Post,* "We never tortured anybody. Sometimes we beat them during the first hours of capture."

If you read the fine print of Obama's policy papers and talk with his advisers and examine their careers, you'll find something surprising about how an Obama administration would view this dark side of the war on terrorism. Far from eschewing alliances with unsavory proxies, these ties are essential to Obama's plans for destroying Al Qaeda. As he has put it, the United States must develop the "partnerships we need to take out the terrorists." Obama hasn't fully fleshed out what he means, but his advisers have some ideas. They told me that he would deepen cooperation with Pakistan's government and military and Somalia's transitional federal government in their battles with Al Qaeda—and that, while opposed to the troop surge, he applauds the partnership between the U.S. military and Iraqi tribal leaders that helped turn the tide in the fight against Al Qaeda there.

So, even though Obama and Petraeus have rhetorically gone in diametrical directions in the last year, they have actually converged on substance. In important ways, an Obama approach to the global insurgency of Al Qaeda mirrors Petraeus's counterinsurgency in Iraq.

Before unpacking the Obama view of the war on terrorism, let's dismiss the comparisons to Jimmy Carter. A bit of a refresher course in the horrors of the late 1970s: Jimmy Carter pledged to enshrine human rights as a central value in U.S. foreign policy. That was an admirable goal, but Carter didn't just inject human rights into U.S. foreign policy; he allowed it to rule policy, no matter the implications for the fight against communism. During the Carter era, the United States cooled its relations with vital client states like the Shah's government in Iran and the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, even as they fought for their lives. The locus classicus of this critique was, of course, Jeane Kirkpatrick's *Commentary* essay, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," where she excoriated the Carter administration for its studied neutrality as pro-American autocrats fell to Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries. She concluded that Carter's foreign policy was incapable of distinguishing between real democratic activists and would-be totalitarians who cloaked their ambitions in the rhetoric of democratic self-determination. "Liberal idealism need not be identical with masochism, and need not be incompatible with the defense of freedom and the national interest," she wrote.

Does her critique apply to Barack Obama, too? That's what John McCain has, in essence, alleged. But to understand why this charge won't stick—and to understand the intellectual DNA of the Obama approach to counterterrorism—you need to review the careers of Richard Clarke and Rand Beers.

Both Clarke and Beers are lifelong national security bureaucrats who left the Bush administration in protest of the Iraq war. Both have offered private advice to Obama and might well hold top posts in his war cabinet. Clarke helped draft the campaign's counterterrorism strategy, and Beers contributed ideas for his August 1, 2007 counterterrorism speech. Both also have the trust of the party's antiwar base and have, in many ways, articulated the Democratic Party's most substantive critique of Bush's war on terrorism.

From some of their criticism of the Bush administration, you might think them soft-power squishes. But, during their careers, they have never expressed much hesitation about working with proxy armies with less than admirable human rights



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records. During the Clinton administration, Beers served as the assistant secretary of state for international narcotics and law enforcement affairs, a bureau known as "drugs and thugs." In that post, he helped conceive Plan Colombia, which has, over the last eight years, funneled about $5.5 billion to the country's military. Much of that has been spent combating the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which has funded its Marxist-Leninist rebellion by presiding over a vast drug empire.

In many ways, the program was a great success. Today, the FARC is nearly defeated, and the civil war in that country is over. But Plan Colombia worked in part because Beers was prepared to assist a national army that worked closely with pro-government death squads—and, for that reason, Plan Colombia provoked the ire of Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy and the left wing of the Democratic Party. Beers takes criticism of this brand of alliance seriously but considers it surmountable. He told me that such alliances require that the United States conditions its assistance: "We are prepared to work with you, but you are going to have to change your stripes. You are going to have to operate in a fashion where that kind of behavior stops." Indeed, in the Colombian instance, there's strong evidence that Beers's plan also helped curb the worst excesses of America's military partners.

Clarke is a somewhat more familiar figure. During congressional testimony, he famously apologized for allowing September 11 to happen while serving as the National Security Council's terrorism czar. He left a long paper trail on Al Qaeda, including the "Delenda Memo" of 1998, which takes its name from the Latin word to "blot out" and was based on a more detailed strategy for regime change in Afghanistan. In both its goals and rhetoric, that strategy harkened back to the cold war. It spoke of "rollback," and, taking a page from the anti-communist strategy of the Reagan years, it called on the government to fight a proxy war against Al Qaeda and their Taliban hosts.

Like Beers's Plan Colombia, Clarke's approach placed the United States in bed with thugs. He proposed "massive support" to the anti-Taliban coalition that included the sadistic warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, who would, in 2001, load thousands of Taliban fighters into sealed containers. When the captives pleaded for air, Dostum's men shot holes in the containers—and many of the prisoners therein. The strategy also called for covert assistance to the regime of Uzbek dictator-for-life Islam Karimov, who has allegedly ordered the boiling of his political opponents. Clarke told me that he and his staff knew that, if such alliances managed to neutralize the threat from Al Qaeda without a major attack, they would face political heat for their tactics: "Everyone would say we were crazy because the disaster never occurred."

Clarke and Beers in effect were drawing on a time-honored tradition of foreign policy that goes back to the Gurkhas: finding proxies to fight an enemy. It was a tradition for America that found its apotheosis in the Reagan Doctrine of the 1980s, which was defined by Charles Krauthammer as "unashamed American support for anti-Communist revolution," regardless of whether or not such support respected the sovereignty of communist states. It was a policy that manifested itself in U.S. support for the Nicaraguan Contras, Jonas Savimbi's insurgency in Angola, and the Afghan mujahedin. In a sense, the Reagan doctrine was a full-throated rejection of the Carter era. It was Kirkpatrick's *Commentary* essay put into practice. So here we arrive at the central irony of the charge that Obama will revive Carterism: The two most important architects of his counterterrorism policy came of age at the height of the Reagan Doctrine, and that thinking continues to inform their strategy.

Last November at a foreign policy forum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Obama said there may be "40,000 hard-core jihadists with whom we can't negotiate." He went on. "Our job is to incapacitate them, to kill them." In that spirit, he famously announced that he would strike terrorist bases in Pakistan if President Pervez Musharraf ever refuses to move on actionable intelligence against Al Qaeda—a threat that earned him the chastisement of John McCain, among others.

Of course, the opportunities for that kind of strike are rare and the diplomatic costs can be high. That's where we begin to see the interesting confluence that will likely emerge as the Obama Doctrine. His counterterrorism policy will bear the imprint of the Beers-Clarke experience in the national security apparatus. And that pedigree will be coupled with the lessons that David Petraeus has gleaned from Iraq. The result will likely be a combination of force and kindness. In the search for allies against Al Qaeda, the U.S. military will aggressively seek out allies among the tribes that co-mingle with the terrorists, as well as the police and intelligence agencies in those countries. Our military would try to pry them away from Al Qaeda by offering them money and basic infrastructure—and then send them into battle against the terrorists. But, at the same time, through that engagement, it would also attempt to instill practices that minimize the brutality and corruption of local police.

A good guide to what such an ambitious program would look like is Obama's plan to give frontline police and intelligence agencies $5 billion over three years through a "Shared Security Partnership Initiative." His campaign materials promise the plan will extend "from the remote islands of Indonesia to the sprawling cities of Africa."

Or take the Pakistan example. Richard Clarke envisions a policy that would pressure and entice the Pakistani military, which has been markedly reluctant to challenge jihadists, to use the same sorts of tactics that have flourished in Iraq: "The Pakistani army is not trained and equipped for counterinsurgency. One of the things we say is, 'We know you are reluctant to do this. But we would like to help you, give you military aid and create an ability to do this.'" As one of Obama's top foreign policy advisers, Susan Rice, puts it, "Obama will support efforts to encourage the legitimate leaders in Pakistan's tribal areas who seek to thwart extremism." (Rice made sure to add that the campaign believed the conditions in Anbar to be different than in the Pakistani frontier and that it was primarily the responsibility of the Pakistanis to root out terrorist safe havens in their sovereign territories.)

Both Clarke and Beers concede that this type of counterinsurgency necessitates keeping some unpleasant company. The Pakistani intelligence services, for instance, have an atrocious history of abetting Al Qaeda; tribal leaders who Obama would like to co-opt operate under prehistoric codes of justice. But the Obama program would attempt to cajole its partners into abandoning brutal tactics.

Clarke explains this as follows: "When you partner with people with unsavory records, it has to be consciously a temporary spate, partnering has to include fixing them, and they have to be genuinely willing to be fixed." In fact, this is the key difference between the Reagan doctrine and the Petraeus-Obama brand of counterinsurgency—where the Reagan doctrine placed its emphasis on blowing up bridges, Petraeus and Obama want to build them. Their program depends



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on winning the allegiances of local populations—a goal undermined, over the long run, by brutal tactics.

Susan Rice is tipped to be a senior figure in an Obama administration. Earlier this month, I sent her a handful of questions about counterterrorism policy. Her answers were filled with all the hedges and qualifications that you would expect in the middle of a campaign. She told me that Obama would eschew a "one size fits all approach" to fighting terrorism. "In some cases that may mean strong support for proxies (as in Anbar). In other places it may mean direct U.S. action. In others, it may mean relying more on an allied government or the international community." But there were several answers she provided that I found highly revealing. She described Obama's opinion of America's historic involvement with insurgency and counterinsurgency. She applauded the 1980s arming of the mujahedin resistance to the Soviets: "[S]upport for the Afghan resistance to Soviet aggression was the right decision in the 1980s." And she said that the Anbar Awakening was "responsible for much of the security progress we have seen in Iraq," though she insisted that Sunni militias must eventually be incorporated into state security forces. In light of some of the criticisms that have been lobbed in Obama's direction, those are pretty suggestive allusions.

Of course, the Obama counterterrorism policy is still a work in progress. As his recent zigzags illustrate, he still hasn't figured out his stance on some of the larger questions. But, in discussing his plans for Iraq, he has made one key admission: He will listen carefully to the advice of his generals. You can easily see how this will play out. Obama will enter office with a set of somewhat inchoate instincts about American power and the importance of outsourcing force. These instincts will mesh with the evolving thinking of his top commanders, who have also begun to realize the limitations of an overstretched army and the value of counter-insurgency. And that brings us back to the situation room on Obama's first day. If he and Petraeus can overcome whatever awkwardness lingers, they will discover a mind meld and an emerging doctrine—a doctrine that looks a lot more like Ronald Reagan than Jimmy Carter. ◆

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# Back to the USSR

*McCain's plan for the next cold war.*

**JOHN B. JUDIS**

John McCain likes to compare himself to Theodore Roosevelt, Barry Goldwater, and Ronald Reagan. But, if he were to become president, could he more closely resemble Richard Nixon? Not Nixon the Watergate dirty trickster, but Nixon the statesman. Could the Arizona senator, despite his extreme rhetoric of the bomb-bomb-Iran variety, be less like a cowboy politician and more like the man who re-opened relations with China and signed a wealth of arms control agreements with the Soviets?

Two years ago, I wrote a profile arguing that there were reasons to believe that McCain was more pragmatic than his support for the Iraq debacle suggested ("Neo-McCain," October 16, 2006). In the interviews I conducted with him in 2006, he repeatedly distanced himself from neoconservatism, reminding me that he talked regularly to realists like Brent Scowcroft. I thought there was a good chance that there was a peacemaker lurking beneath McCain's warrior exterior—that a President McCain might be able use his hawkish reputation to, say, bring Iraq's warring parties together or to lure Iran to the bargaining table.

I wasn't the only one. Since McCain secured the Republican nomination, I've heard echoes of my ambivalence from foreign policy experts, including some who plan to vote for Obama. "McCain has Nixon-goes-to-China credentials," one told me. But, based on McCain's actions over the last two years and conversations I've had with those close to him, I have concluded that this is wishful thinking. McCain continues to rely on the same neoconservative advisers; he still thinks U.S. foreign policy should focus on transforming rogue states and autocracies into democracies that live under the shadow of American power; and he no longer tells credulous reporters that he consults Scowcroft.

That is not to say McCain's views are static. He has, for example, rethought the tactics of the Iraq war. But he continues to believe that Baghdad can become "a strong stable democratic ally" and "a strong ally against an aggressive and radical Iran" (this despite Iraq's pro-Iranian Shia majority). McCain may no longer believe that the United States can single-handedly overthrow undemocratic governments, but he now wants to change enemy regimes via a "League of Democracies" that would pointedly exclude states like Russia. Indeed, McCain, known in the Senate for his quickness to anger, has displayed a growing tendency to personalize foreign policy, seemingly basing his approach to Moscow on his hostility toward Vladimir Putin. If John McCain's foreign policy is changing, it is only becoming more combustible, not less.

McCain began his career in Washington as a realist who, because of Vietnam, was reluctant to sanction the use of military force. He felt the United States should intervene abroad only if its national interest was directly challenged—and then only if it had massive public support and sufficient force to carry the day. That was McCain's version of the Powell Doctrine, and it led him to call for withdrawal from Lebanon in 1983; to caution against a tanker war with Iran in the Gulf in 1987; to warn against "trading American blood for Iraqi blood" in August 1990; and to oppose the Clinton administration's intervention in Haiti and (initially) Bosnia.

But, in the '90s, McCain underwent a conversion. American success in the Gulf war made him less reluctant to use force overseas, and, in 1993, he became chairman of the International Republican Institute, a government-funded organization that promotes democracy and human rights abroad. Then, in 1998, during the debates over the Iraq Liberation Act and intervention in Kosovo, McCain and his chief of staff, Mark Salter, began working closely with the neoconservatives around *The Weekly Standard* and the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), including William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Marshall Wittmann, Randy Scheunemann, Gary Schmitt, Max Boot, and Daniel McKivergan. These neoconservatives were different from the first generation of former leftists who had opposed Jimmy Carter's universal emphasis on human rights and had backed Ronald Reagan's



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aggressive anti-communism. They were radicals who believed in transforming the world in America's image—and under its hegemony. Emboldened by the fall of the Soviet Union, they called for an American crusade for democracy and against rogue state regimes.

McCain became a believer in this neoconservative faith, which fit his newfound interest in democratic reform and his revulsion toward dictators like Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong Il. The neoconservative vision of a new American century also jibed with his admiration for Theodore Roosevelt's imperial foreign policy. During the 2000 campaign, McCain drew on Kristol, Kagan, Scheunemann, and Wittmann for foreign policy advice, and after the campaign he continued to work closely with them. In 2003, like those at PNAC and *The Weekly Standard*, he thought the Iraqis would rise up in support of the U.S. invasion and that Ahmad Chalabi would lead a new pro-American government.

This year, as McCain tightened his grip on the Republican nomination for president, he once again called on many of these same neoconservatives. Scheunemann (who coined the term "rogue state rollback") is his chief foreign policy aide, traveling with him and speaking on his behalf; McKivergan serves on his campaign staff; Wittmann is the press aide for Joe Lieberman, who is almost always at McCain's side; and Schmitt and Boot are advisers. McCain talks regularly with Kristol, who is at the center of the neoconservative network, and he relies heavily on Kagan for his major foreign policy addresses, including the speeches he delivered at the Hoover Institution in May 2007 and in Los Angeles this March.

If you want to understand McCain's worldview, read Kagan's recent book; *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* reflects a new iteration of neoconservatism that McCain has embraced. Whereas, during the '90s, McCain—like Kristol, Kagan, and others—believed that the United States reigned supreme over a unipolar world challenged chiefly by rogue states, he now sees a more complicated, multipolar world in which the United States has to share power with the European Union, Japan, China, India, and Russia, while still battling foes like North Korea and Iran. "In such a world, where power of all kinds is more widely and evenly distributed," McCain said in Los Angeles, "the United States cannot lead by virtue of its power alone."

Most foreign policy experts would agree, but McCain puts a neoconservative spin on this analysis. He sees the world as riven by a struggle between democracies and autocracies. On one side are the United States, the European Union, Japan, India, and other representative governments; on the other are Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, and those countries whose "rulers [are] trying to rebuild nineteenth-century autocracies in a twenty-first-century world." McCain still believes "the struggle against radical Islamic extremism" is a "transcendent issue," but he's subordinated it to this broader conflict. In his Hoover speech, he depicted the war on terrorism as only "part of the worldwide political, economic, and philosophical struggle … between liberty and despotism."

To fight and win this worldwide struggle, McCain has proposed a "League of Democracies" led by the United States. "We cannot build an enduring peace based on freedom by ourselves, and we do not want to," McCain said in Los Angeles. "We have to strengthen our global alliances as the core of a new global compact—a League of Democracies—that can harness the vast influence of the more than one hundred democratic nations around the world to advance our values and defend our shared interests." And, in a *Foreign Affairs* article, he wrote, "If I am elected president, during my first year in office I will call a summit of the world's democracies to seek the views of my counterparts and explore the steps necessary to realize this vision—just as America led in creating NATO six decades ago."

THE PROBLEM with this analogy and with McCain's division of the world more broadly is that it imposes a dynamic on world politics that simply doesn't exist. While obviously there are democracies and autocracies, there is little evidence that the one is engaged with the other in a worldwide struggle over what form of government is best, as the United States and the Soviet Union were during the cold war. The Chinese are not trying to impose communism on Germany, for example; nor is Germany trying to export parliamentary democracy to China. Countries still go to war, of course, but they most often do so for non-ideological reasons: territory, regional hegemony, access to natural resources, and so on. Existing alliances often cut across different forms of government, as in the U.S. alliance with Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Because this struggle does not exist, McCain's solution to it—his League of Democracies—would not advance American interests. As Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has argued, the organization would be ill-equipped to address major problems like global warming, trade protection, nuclear proliferation, and resource scarcity, because solving those problems requires cooperation between democracies and autocracies. Even when such cooperation isn't needed, a League is unlikely to be useful: The democracies themselves can't even agree on when to promote democracy. South Africa has refused to intervene in Zimbabwe; Europe won't clamp down on Russia; and, whatever their election-year bluster, a succession of American presidents has been reluctant to ruffle China's feathers.

But the greatest problem with McCain's division of the world is that it threatens to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. McCain isn't advocating a new cold war, but, if he initiated a global struggle against autocracy by founding a League of Democracies, the resulting split would roughly reproduce the cold war confrontation between West and East. By building a new organization that excludes Russia and China, the United States would create gratuitous tensions with these countries. Even without such provocation, U.S. and European relations with Russia have been growing more fractious since 2002, and McCain's approach threatens to exacerbate them in particular.

Some of the existing disagreements between Moscow and the West reflect a struggle for influence in Central Asia and in the countries on Russia's western flank. But the anger in Moscow also comes in response to what Vladimir Putin and other Russians perceive as slights from the United States and its European allies. These include the enlargement of NATO, which is still a military alliance, to include former Soviet republics; NATO and U.S. support for the Albanian Kosovars against Russia's Serbian allies; the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline deliberately bypassing Russia; the invasion of Russian ally Iraq and the abrogation of older Russian oil contracts with Iraq; Western support, from McCain's IRI among others, for the anti-Russian party in Ukraine's 2004 election; and NATO's plan to construct anti-missile emplacements in Poland and the Czech Republic.

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Russia's backlash against the United States and Europe began under Boris Yeltsin during the war in Kosovo. It was partly suppressed by the country's economic dependence on the West during those years, but rising oil prices have revived Russia's economy and emboldened its elites. Although Putin's lurch toward authoritarianism at home may have reflected his own priorities, any Russian leader probably would have pursued a similar approach abroad. Ivan Krastev, a political scientist at the Center for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, writes, "The Kremlin's new foreign policy is not circumstantial in nature. It is the expression of a new foreign policy consensus within the Russian elite and the Russian society at large."

How, then, should the United States react? Carefully, it would seem, criticizing Russia's authoritarianism but recognizing that Russia has legitimate security concerns and that the United States and Europe need its cooperation on vital issues like nuclear proliferation and arms reduction (which McCain advocates); Iran's uranium enrichment; the Middle East peace process; the future of Afghanistan and Iraq; and the availability of oil and natural gas.

But McCain's response has been to throw down the gauntlet. He has called Putin's complaints about the United States "childish." When Putin criticized the Bush administration in 2007 for following a "unipolar model" of foreign policy—a criticism that many Democrats shared—McCain accused Putin of trying to start a new cold war. While the Bush administration has insisted that the anti-missile batteries it hopes to place in Eastern Europe are meant to defend against Iranian missiles, McCain says they are needed as "a hedge against potential threats" from Russia and China. That's incredibly provocative—tantamount to defining NATO again as an anti-Russian alliance. McCain continues to support the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Act's trade restrictions on Russian exports long after Soviet restrictions on Jewish emigration—the original basis for the sanction—were lifted. By doing that, he is singling out Russia from among the many pseudo-democracies or autocracies that enjoy trading relations with the United States. And, in his Los Angeles speech, McCain inserted into Kagan's draft a proposal to kick Russia out of the Group of Eight. To promote democracy, he proposed "ensuring that the G-8 becomes again a club of leading market democracies: it should include Brazil and India but exclude Russia."

Dmitri Trenin, the deputy director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, describes McCain as "an echo of the cold war" and says that "Russians see him as a guy from the past." In his recent book, *Getting Russia Right*, Trenin lays out what would happen if McCain got his way with the G-8. "Russia's foreign policy would turn overtly anti-American, and Moscow would feel the need to found or join a rival club." Highlighting the absurdity of McCain's provocation, his proposal can't possibly work. The G-8 operates by consensus, and other members are opposed.

Why would McCain make such a proposal, a proposal Kagan and other advisers oppose? The answer may lie with his tendency to personalize foreign policy conflicts. Like Bush, McCain looked into Putin's soul, but, where Bush saw a man "deeply committed to his country," McCain saw only devilry: "I looked into Putin's eyes and saw three things: a K and a G and a B." McCain has repeatedly displayed his contempt for the Russian. He has called Putin a "spoiled child" who exhibits "aberrational" behavior and a "totalitarian dictator who . . . is trying to revert [to] the old Russian Empire." And he continues to see Russia entirely through the prism of Putin, dismissing his successor, Dmitry Medvedev, as "Putin's puppet." This tendency to personalize is common among neoconservatives who divide the world into good and evil. But, with McCain, who has always associated himself with Kagan and the more thoughtful neoconservatives, it may be more a product of his tendency to anger—and a mentality that more closely resembles the warrior than the statesman.

Indeed, McCain's cowboy antagonism extends beyond Russia. Two years ago, talking as if he were a Mafia don, McCain urged U.S. forces in Iraq to "take out" anti-American cleric Muqtada Al Sadr. In February, he publicly wished that Fidel Castro would hurry up and die, saying, "I hope he has the opportunity to meet Karl Marx very soon." Most significantly, he's apparently allowed his disgust with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—McCain says that he refuses to "learn how to pronounce [his] name"—to cloud his judgment, identifying the Iranian president as responsible for Tehran's nuclear ambitions even though Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is in charge of the country's foreign policy.

So could McCain still do a "Nixon-goes-to-China"? Nixon was a realist whose achievement as a statesman (as distinct from his failure as president) rested on his recognition of the limits of American power. He understood when he came to office that the United States could not hope to achieve victory in Vietnam but would have to settle for an imperfect compromise and, after backtracking, eventually did.

Nixon, who could get into a funk over domestic opponents, was capable of an eerie detachment when it came to evaluating foreign leaders. He could also appreciate the historic insecurities that led countries to distrust the United States and each other. He confined his apocalyptic warnings of a worldwide communist conspiracy to domestic politics. He understood that beneath the appearance of socialist solidarity lay growing hostility between Russia and China, which the United States could exploit.

By contrast, McCain is a radical idealist who wants to transform the world and is reluctant to acknowledge limits to this enterprise. He imagines a "democratic" Iraq opposed to Iran and occupied indefinitely by American troops. And McCain does not seem to possess Nixon's detachment when it comes to foreign affairs. He can't see what drove Putin and now his successor to distance themselves from the United States; or what—since the time of the pro-American Shah—has driven Iran, irrespective of Ahmadinejad, to seek a nuclear capability.

If anything, McCain brings the same readiness to anger to bear in foreign relations that marked his tenure in the Senate. But it's one thing to blow up at a colleague and quite another to do so at a foreign president. The former may lead to difficulties in getting a bill passed; the latter to protracted conflict and even war. If one insists upon identifying a nation with its leader and seeing that leader as either incurably wicked or deeply irrational, then that rules out diplomacy or deterrence. Regime change becomes the only way of addressing a foe's antagonism. That, of course, was the argument that McCain and others used to justify the invasion of Iraq, and he seems to be making the same argument about Russia and Iran. John McCain has certainly had moments of greatness as a man and a politician, but, as a statesman, he's no Richard Nixon. ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO



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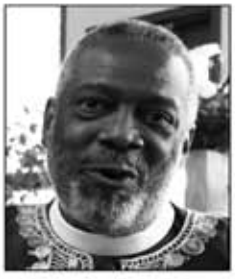

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– **EDDIE LOPEZ**, Former United Methodist Pastor, New York

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# Salter Ego

*Meet the high priest of the McCain cult.*

MICHAEL CROWLEY

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On September 27, 1999, as John McCain traveled to Nashua, New Hampshire, to announce his first campaign for the presidency, one of his top aides was nervous. The speech McCain was set to deliver was mostly standard fare, filled with promises of reform and assertions of America's greatness, but its closing passages struck a more somber note. "I have passed from a young man to an old one in the service of my country," the text read. "When my time is over, I want only the satisfaction of knowing I was true to the faith of our fathers." Another line referred to McCain's determination to protect the United States "until my life's end." "If you read those words on paper they sound eloquent but really gloomy," recalls Dan Schnur, who was the campaign's communications director. Schnur sought out Mark Salter, the author of the speech, to discuss his reservations.

Salter, who has worked for McCain for nearly 20 years, is the senator's chief speechwriter. He is also the co-author, with McCain, of five best-selling books detailing McCain's life story and worldview. Burly and goateed, Salter is a rare combination of strategist, buddy, therapist, and favorite-son figure to the candidate. A heavy smoker with a sharp tongue, he can also be a brooding presence. Some McCain aides joke that they are relieved when he leaves campaign headquarters because they find his grim moods contagious.

Salter is the main architect, via the many books and speeches, of what you might call the McCain code. McCain, says Salter, "is not an introspective or contemplative guy. But he has instincts, or a code of behavior, that I guess is a kind of philosophy." It's been Salter's job to articulate and package this code. The 53-year-old Salter is, as Schnur puts it, "the custodian of John McCain's identity."

With the dark passages in the New Hampshire kickoff speech, however, Schnur wondered whether Salter had made a misstep in his marketing of the code—and the candidate. "I remember really arguing with Mark," Schnur says. "I said, 'You're going to make him sound like Edgar Allen Poe!' " But Salter held firm and McCain delivered the speech as written. Schnur says he realized, while listening, that Salter was right after all. "Mark understood McCain well enough to know that, when those lines were delivered, they lent a sense of sobriety and seriousness that was very appropriate."

Almost nine years later, Salter is still McCain's chief wordsmith as well as a top campaign operative and, for all practical purposes, McCain's brain. Indeed, he is the one senior aide to have survived McCain's multiple campaign staff shakeups. "Salter's just spent so much time with McCain that I don't know if McCain's figured out Salter or Salter's figured out McCain," says former McCain media adviser Mark McKinnon. Another person friendly with both men calls it a "mind meld." But Salter not only channels McCain better than anyone. He has also demonstrated a one-of-a-kind instinct for how to craft McCain's public image. Over the years, he has taken the raw material of McCain's biography and temperament and turned it into a compelling narrative that supersedes politics—one about an independent-minded war hero who celebrates courage and humility, demands individual sacrifice, and excoriates vanity.

The belief that McCain represents ideals above and beyond politics made him into a household hero across the United States. But now McCain and the code that Salter has crafted for him are facing a mighty challenge in the form of Barack Obama, who offends their core principles. It is particularly vexing for Salter that Obama the orator so outshines McCain, who, though now ridiculed as an inept speaker, has in past years delivered several powerful addresses.

Desperate to reverse this perception, Salter is working hard on McCain's crucial address for September's Republican convention. To beat Obama, he'll have to update the McCain brand for a changed political environment. That won't be easy. Salter's vision of McCain wasn't just tailored for public consumption. It was also fashioned for himself.

A few months after he returned home from Vietnam in 1973, John McCain wrote a 12,000-word account of his five-and-a-half years captivity in a Vietnamese prison for *U.S. News & World Report*. The detailed narrative is crude, offering precious little insight or writerly grace: "The Oriental, as you may know, likes to beat around the bush quite a bit"; "A lot of [the guards] were homosexual, although never toward us"; "you never can fathom the 'gooks.' " McCain's conclusions tend to be banal. "Now I see more of an appreciation of our way of life. There is more patriotism. The flag is all over the place."

Twenty-six years later, in 1999, McCain published the autobiographical book *Faith of My Fathers*. Once again, McCain sought to articulate the lessons of his Vietnam experience. But, this time, the results were radically different. Captivity, he wrote,

> helped me achieve a balance in my life, a balance between my own individualism and more important things. . . . I discovered I was dependent on others to a greater extent than I had ever realized, but that neither they nor the cause we served made any claims on my identity. On the contrary, they gave me a larger sense of myself than I had had before.

McCain's newfound eloquence was less the result of intellectual maturation than of a chance meeting with a young political operative, Mark Salter. During the 1988 Republican convention, Salter, then a press aide for former U.N. ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, got lost in the massive New Orleans Superdome and was spotted by McCain aide Torie Clarke, who mistook the stocky Iowan for a bodyguard. The two hit it off, and Salter shared some writing with Clarke, who encouraged McCain to hire him. "McCain had a speech coming up on bilingual education. It was very controversial," remembers Clarke. Salter penned the remarks for McCain, "and it was a big success." Salter was hired as a mid-level aide, and, within four years, he'd ascended to McCain's chief of staff.

McCain hadn't previously relied on a true speechwriter. But, with Salter's help, McCain began to focus on the theme that redefined his career and helped transform him from a little-known senator to a national celebrity: an intense, moralistic patriotism and fetishization of character. He memorably articulated this theme in a speech celebrating the 1996 Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole at the GOP convention. "In America," McCain said, "we celebrate the virtues of the quiet hero; the modest man who does his duty without complaint or expectation of praise; the man who listens closely for the call of his country, and, when she calls, he answers without reservation, not for fame or reward, but for love. He loves his country."

The speech was a departure from McCain's usual inelegant, choppy banter; but it was a hit. (William Safire pronounced it a "gem . . . constructed well and delivered with extraordinary authority.") "Mark is about commas and semicolons," says Schnur. "John McCain speaks in periods and exclamation points. Mark's eloquence can lift him."

The following year, a New York literary agent approached McCain about writing a book on his family's storied military history (McCain's father and grandfather were also decorated Navy men). McCain and Salter collaborated on the project, with McCain dictating memories to his partner at night in his Senate office. Salter would limn those memories with his solemn,



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dramatic prose and give drafts to McCain to edit on flights back to Arizona.

Salter's role during this time was as much therapist as editor. McCain was initially reluctant to discuss his Vietnam experience, Salter has explained, preferring to write about his father and grandfather. But Salter convinced McCain to chronicle his own trials as well—a critical choice along McCain's path to national fame. The result was *Faith of My Fathers*, whose 1999 publication—and long stay on the best-seller list—was timed perfectly for McCain's first presidential bid, amplifying as it did the McCain code of patriotism and courage as the building blocks of character.

*Faith of My Fathers* was also the first installment of a literary franchise for McCain and Salter. The two men have since pumped out, at the rate of about one every other year, four more best-sellers, all promoting the same essential code. In each case, the books identify McCain as the author, "with Mark Salter"; Salter's name is always featured prominently, in contrast to the collaborators and ghostwriters so often given little or no credit by their politician-employers. Each of them uses short portraits of (mostly) famous people to illustrate McCain's core values (which is also a neat way of dodging the appearance of narcissism, even if the books are of course really meant to be about McCain himself). Thus, 2002's *Worth the Fighting For* recounts McCain's post-Vietnam years via sketches of heroes from Theodore Roosevelt to Ted Williams to Henry "Scoop" Jackson. In 2004, *Why Courage Matters: The Way to a Braver Life* celebrated such figures as civil rights hero John Lewis and Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi. The next year brought *Character Is Destiny: Inspiring Stories Every Young Person Should Know and Every Adult Should Remember*, hailing everyone from Gandhi to Mandela. And last year's *Hard Call* recaps high-stakes decisions by the likes of Winston Churchill and Mikhail Gorbachev. It is possible that some great man or woman has not yet been lionized in a McCain book, but not terribly likely.

Salter's writing is consistently elegant, if occasionally grandiloquent. He unfurls a story as adroitly as he articulates McCain's broader worldview—that what matters in a leader is not ideology, or even a set of defined policy-based principles, but character. "It is your character, and your character alone, that will make your life happy or unhappy," McCain declares in *Character Is Destiny*.

Preachy? Sure. But the McCain-Salter books have served their purpose. As *Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne noted in an admiring review of *Character Is Destiny*: "[Y]ou can make the case that the greatest success of the Republican senator from Arizona has not been as a politician but as a creator of his own public personality—as an existential hero and the author of inspirational books."

The McCain reinvention project engineered by Salter was, at first, perfectly calibrated for its time. When *Faith* was published in 1999, the Monica Lewinsky scandal had left America fretting over its leaders' morality. Politics in the '90s also seemed exceedingly plastic and phony. People yearned for men of "character." The McCain code would never have a more propitious moment.

But times have changed, and McCain has come to represent something different: a wistful philosophy that hearkens back to dying, traditional American values and the crucibles of long-ago wars. What voters now seem to want more than anything is change, a new direction, a break from the past—all the things so perfectly embodied by Barack Obama.

When McCain is on the road, Mark Salter is a fixture at his side—"like a shadow," says one scribe who has logged many miles on the Straight Talk Express. Reporters who have covered McCain typically recall Salter clad in mud clogs and jeans, perhaps a shabby sweater, nervously pacing in the shadows of a McCain event. When outdoors, he can usually be found in aviator sunglasses and, whenever possible, sucking on a cigarette. But, while McCain likes to ham it up on his bus, Salter is a worrier. Former McCain adviser John Weaver recalls getting a call from a fretful Salter at 3 a.m. on the morning after a major McCain speech asking, like a child in a horror movie, "Are they coming?" ("They," in this case, being the unforgiving press.)

Salter has reason to worry—he is a central player in the campaign, particularly when it comes to communications tactics and strategy. After McCain finishes an important speech or debate, Salter is often the first aide he consults for feedback. And, beyond managing McCain's psyche—Salter can speak more candidly to his boss than virtually anyone on staff—Salter also has real operational clout over McCainland. After *The New York Times* reported in February that suspicious McCain aides had blocked a comely Washington lobbyist, Vicki Iseman, from the senator's orbit, Salter denied the claim to *Time.com* on the grounds that the only person with "the authority to ban a person from the office or instruct staff to keep their distance from someone" was himself, and he had not done so. (While Salter's clout waned after McCain's summer 2007 staff purge, this month's latest shakeup, sidelining campaign manager Rick Davis, may reverse that, a person close to the campaign says.)

But Salter's anxiety has roots far deeper than the immediate concerns of the campaign. Friends say he has a fascination with the darker side of the human condition. It is revealing that his literary hero is William Trevor, the Irish writer famed for the tragic cast of his novels and voluminous short stories. (A *Washington Post* review of Trevor's most recent story collection described it as "built around dark incidents" and chronicling "how people's lives are shaped and bound together by calamity.") McCain, too, is a Trevor devotee. And, while this may be just one enthusiasm, it hints at a common worldview: Beneath their fixation on character and moral rectitude, Salter and McCain also have "a shared literary sensibility"—in the words of Jake Tapper, an ABC News correspondent who has covered McCain extensively and knows Salter well—that is heavy on themes of loss and fatalism. "Salter is very much like McCain," adds one friend. "They both have a worldview that is tragic."

This is most notable, perhaps, in McCain's oft-stated reverence for Robert Jordan, the protagonist of Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. An entire chapter of *Worth the Fighting For* is dedicated to Jordan, an American who fights and dies on a futile mission in the Spanish Civil War. "For a long time," McCain and Salter write, "Robert Jordan was the man I admired above almost all others in life and fiction." For McCain, Jordan seems to resonate with his experience as a defiant Vietnam POW: "In the war that Hemingway remembered," he explains in the book, anti-fascist fighters like Jordan "were dedicated to the cause, willing to sacrifice their lives for it, but vulnerable to disappointment at the hands of cynical politicians who controlled their fate and the weary realism of the people they had come to save. Their heroism was a beautiful fatalism."

More than anything, however, McCain seems to admire Jordan's sheer hopelessness. This worldview makes sense in McCain's case—he endured years of torture and solitary confinement, after all. Less clear is why it became Salter's. Some friends attribute Salter's darkness to his rough-and-tumble youth. "Mark is a complicated person," says someone who knows him. "He grew up in a really tough way."

Salter was born into a Catholic house-



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THE MILTON FRIEDMAN PRIZE FOR ADVANCING LIBERTY

# In Tribute to Yon Goicoechea

## Recipient of the 2008 Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty

YON GOICOECHEA, leader of the pro-democracy student movement in Venezuela, was awarded the Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty by the Cato Institute on May 15, 2008, in New York City. Under Goicoechea's leadership, the student movement organized mass opposition to the erosion of human and civil rights in Venezuela and played the key role in defeating Hugo Chávez's bid for a constitutional reform that would have turned the country into a dictatorship. In the face of ongoing death threats, personal attacks, and intimidation resulting from his prominent leadership, he has been indispensible in organizing massive protest marches that have captured the world's attention. Goicoechea's vision of optimism, tolerance, and modernity have breathed new life into efforts to defend basic freedoms in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America where freedom is threatened.

The Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty is presented every other year to an individual who has made a significant contribution to advance human freedom and includes a cash award of $500,000. For further information go to **www.cato.org/friedmanprize.**

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hold in Davenport, Iowa, in 1955. His mother was a schoolteacher, and his father, Pete, was a traveling salesman and an Army veteran awarded a Silver Star in Korea. Pete Salter never talked much about his military experience, however, and it was only later that Mark would learn the full story of his service.

As a boy, Salter delighted in toy soldiers and *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* comic books, he recently told *The Boston Globe*'s Sasha Issenberg. His life initially followed the civilian trajectory of a working-class baby-boomer. A feckless high school student, Salter sang in a rock band and wound up swinging heavy tools on the Iowa railroads for a few years to the tune of $4.25 an hour. The work was known as section gang labor. "It was one at a time," he explained to me, somewhat reluctantly, over a dark Irish ale at a Washington restaurant. "You pulled the spikes from the tie with a giant crowbar, five feet long. Jacked up the track, dug the old ties out. Dug a deeper hole and spiked it up and then went on to the next tie." (Salter's barrel chest and thick arms testify to this.) Layered in thick wool, the gang would work through winter temperatures reaching 20 below. On Thursdays, his crewmates would get their paychecks and cash them at a local bar "and drink half of it," he says. But, in time, Salter looked around and saw "men in their fifties who looked like they were in their eighties." Thinking that "there doesn't seem to be a future here," he decided to enroll at a nearby university.

Salter transferred to Georgetown University and, after graduation, ended up working for Kirkpatrick, before his fated hiring by McCain. The two men bonded quickly, thanks in part to their shared military heritage—even though Salter himself, to his regret, never had the opportunity to serve. Moreover, McCain was reticent to talk about the wartime horrors he'd witnessed, reminding Salter of his own father's reticence. "People write about how McCain is unnecessarily modest," Salter told *Salon* in 1999. "But it's perfectly consistent with the way my father talked about his war experience."

The project of drawing out McCain helped to complete Salter's understanding of his own father. The culmination of that effort was a section in *Why Courage Matters* that describes Pete Salter's long-obscured Korean War valor, with many details his son learned only while researching the book. Remarkably, Salter found a way to salute his own father in what many readers no doubt took as McCain's voice. The book reveals how Pete Salter fought alongside a Native American corporal named Mitchell Red Cloud, a minor hero of Army history. During a brutal battle with Chinese soldiers near Chonghyon, Korea, Red Cloud was severely injured but insisted on staying behind to give his retreating comrades cover. At his urging, Pete Salter tied his wounded comrade to a tree so he could continue firing while others escaped.

Though the younger Salter, who never injects himself into this narrative, doesn't note it, this was an eerie echo of the demise of Hemingway's Robert Jordan, who urges his companions on to safety as he waits alone on a hilltop with his rifle awaiting an unstoppable Fascist charge. (Later that day, the elder Salter would kill two Chinese soldiers, including one he choked with his bare hands.) Pete Salter died in 1999, but, according to some friends, Mark has not been fatherless. "McCain is his dad—that's how he feels about it," says one Salter friend. (Salter himself rejects such talk.)

Salter's writing about his father makes clear that he, like McCain, is keenly aware of his ties to a past legacy, to an era of U.S. wars now fading into mythology. Thanks to Red Cloud, he wrote, Pete Salter "owed his life, and all that came of his life, including his children, to another man's courage . . . he knew [that debt] would survive him and be carried by his descendants."

And, perhaps because Salter's fascination with McCain is so heavily rooted in a receding and romanticized past—an ethos that many say will condemn McCain's candidacy to a Bob Dole–like fate—melancholy notes often creep into his work. Echoing the campaign announcement speech that unnerved Dan Schnur, McCain's 2000 Republican convention address also departed from partisan cant to touch on the theme of mortality. "America's greatness is a quest without end, the object beyond the horizon," McCain said. "And it is an inescapable and bittersweet irony of life that the older we are, the more distant the horizon becomes. I will not see what's over America's horizon. The years that remain are not too few, I trust, but the immortality that was the aspiration of my youth, has, like all the treasures of youth, quietly slipped away." In the speech's closing line McCain ominously concluded: "I am haunted by the vision of what will be."

This vision of the future came to Salter on a Saturday night in late May 2006, as he sat down at his home computer to check the latest news about McCain. A search led Salter to a fresh blog item on the liberal *Huffington Post*. Titled "Why I Spoke Up," it was written by a young woman named Jean Rohe. A day earlier, Rohe had spoken just before McCain at the commencement ceremony of Manhattan's New School. Rohe unexpectedly castigated McCain, roundly condemning his support for the Iraq war. Now she was amplifying the incident across the Internet via *The Huffington Post*.

Salter is neither a humorless man nor an intolerant one. McKinnon recalls a campaign swing through Kentucky, during which a jug of moonshine appeared on the Straight Talk Express after the candidate had called it a night. "Salter gets it and takes like five huge gulps of the thing," he recalls. "We call Mark the next morning, and he says he's paralyzed from the waist down and blind." He also counts among his close friends several members of the D.C. media establishment—a rare quality in a senior Republican operative. Reporters return the compliment. "I never once found him to lie to me or deceive me," says one person who has covered McCain extensively for a major news outlet. "And I don't give that compliment too lightly. I think he works pretty hard at that reputation."

But reading Rohe's words, and especially what he calls the "toxic" anti-McCain vitriol of the blog's often-anonymous commenters, Salter felt his blood boil. He hammered out a ferocious response:

> Once upon time, even among the young, the words courage and hero were used more sparingly, more precisely. It took no courage to do what you did, Ms. Rohe. It was an act of vanity and nothing more. . . . [McCain] has, over and over again, risked personal ambitions for what he believes, rightly or wrongly, are in the best interests of the country. What, pray tell, have you risked? The only person you have succeeded in making look like an idiot is yourself. . . . Should you grow up and ever get down to the hard business of making a living and finding a purpose for your lives beyond self-indulgence some of you might then know a happiness far more sublime than the fleeting pleasure of living in an echo chamber. And if you are that fortunate, you might look back on the day of your graduation and your discourtesy to a good and honest man with a little shame and the certain knowledge that it is very unlikely any of you will ever posses one small fraction of the character of John McCain.

Salter posted this screed under Rohe's item at 10:28 p.m. By the next day, *The Huffington Post* was featuring it under



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the giddy headline TOP MCCAIN AIDE INSULTS ENTIRE COLLEGE GRADUATING CLASS. Today, Salter admits he may have gotten carried away, perhaps with the aid of a couple of glasses of wine with dinner.

But, while he couldn't know it then, the episode foreshadowed the way that Salter would come to view the current campaign. In Rohe's place, today, is Barack Obama. And he, too, according to Salter's view of him, violates the McCain code in nearly every way: He is vain but not experienced; his campaign is focused on an individual, not the greater good; he has not demonstrated real courage in life or politics. Meanwhile, a supercilious culture is tearing down Salter's idol. McCain, once revered as a hero, is now regularly mocked as a doddering buffoon on liberal blogs and "The Daily Show" by people—unlike John McCain and Pete Salter—who often have made no sacrifice of their own for America.

And, as with Rohe, Salter has been firing back with increasing verve. After *Newsweek* published a May cover story predicting that Republicans would mount scurrilous racially tinged attacks against Obama, Salter fired off a long response to the magazine's editor, Jon Meacham. "Without a trace of skepticism, your reporters embraced the primary communications strategy the Obama campaign intends to follow," Salter fumed. After a detailed *Washington Post* report about McCain's allegedly explosive temper, Salter e-mailed *National Review Online* dissecting "one of the more shoddy examples of journalism I've ever encountered" and, with one exception, "the worst smear job on McCain I'd ever seen." Arianna Huffington, Salter quipped recently, is "a flake and a poser and an attention-seeking diva."

But nothing seems to rile up Salter like Obama himself. In a February speech drafted by Salter, McCain cracked that he did not harbor the "presumption that I am blessed with such personal greatness that history has anointed me to save my country in its hour of need"—clearly a taunt aimed at Obama. Salter recently told *The Boston Globe* that Obama's campaign is based around a "messianic complex." "Yeah, I think politics have changed," Salter said to me, referring to Obama's campaign. "The politics are: 'Elect me!'"

Like Jean Rohe, Obama also provoked Salter into some intemperate typing—even before the campaign began. After Obama and McCain differed over ethics reform, in early 2006, Salter wrote a long and overheated letter under McCain's name ripping Obama for "self interested partisan posturing," leading to unhelpful press chatter about McCain's temper. (Salter says Weaver often jokes about removing the "send" button from his keyboard.)

All the more galling for Salter is his belief that Obama the candidate is lifting from McCain's oeuvre. Obama has recently described his transformation from a selfish young man who thought "life was all about me" to an adult who realizes "that life doesn't count for much unless you're willing to do your small part to leave our children—all of our children—a better world. Even if it's difficult. Even if the work seems great. Even if we don't get very far in our lifetime." Salter hears in this an echo of McCain's longtime account of outgrowing his troublemaking and self-centered youth to find a higher purpose in serving others. ("I often regret that we didn't copyright 'serving a cause greater than your self-interest,'" he cracks.)

Even more provocatively, Obama recently cited as one of his favorite novels—you guessed it—*For Whom the Bell Tolls*. When I relayed this to Salter, he was initially incredulous, then burst into laughter. "Is that right? Well, that's another thing he steals from McCain! That's amazing."

Salter may feel a particular rivalry with Obama because so much of Obama's success derives from his ability to write and deliver a beautiful speech. Salter confesses he hasn't yet forced himself to read Obama's memoir, *Dreams From My Father*. But, while he concedes that Obama is an excellent writer and speaker, he believes McCain's oratory has been unfairly derided. "I know we're running against a once-in-a generation orator. I get all that," he says. "But the idea that McCain is not an effective political orator …" Salter trails off in frustration, then goes on to note that McCain's speeches at the 1996, 2000, and 2004 GOP conventions—the last being a speech in support of the Iraq war that many described as better than any George W. Bush had delivered—were all show-stealers. "When he nominated [Bob] Dole—for all the crap he takes compared to Obama, that was generally remembered as the best speech of the '96 convention," Salter grouses.

Salter concedes McCain's current campaign hasn't done itself any favors. "We did not well serve our candidate" on June 3, he says, the night Obama claimed the Democratic nomination, and when McCain spoke to a sparse crowd before a garish green banner that made the candidate look ghostly pale and earned him ridicule even from Fox News commentators. Salter added that he regrets the speech's anti-Obama refrain, "That's not change we can believe in." "That wasn't really an authentic McCain construct," he adds.

Salter's own style may be part of the problem. Some fellow wordsmiths wonder whether his writing voice, so fluid in the books, is well-suited for McCain's delivery. Salter's is "a complex, nuanced prose that McCain has trouble reading, even though he is more comfortable with it than any other rhetorical style," says former Clinton speechwriter David Kusnet, who adds that "McCain is most comfortable delivering these speeches as if he were giving a reading at a bookstore, not trying to rouse a large crowd."

Now Salter has one last chance to write a great convention speech for his boss. He is headed to his summer cottage in Maine—purchased with his share of the book royalties he splits with McCain (who gives his half to charity)—to focus on a task fellow McCainiacs acknowledge will be critical. "It's a big moment," says Mark McKinnon. "The convention is a big damn deal." Salter hints the speech will spotlight McCain's moments of self-sacrifice, as when he refused early release from captivity in Vietnam or challenged his own party over campaign finance reform. The contrast, he says, will be the "selfishness" of "self-interested" political partisans—i.e. Obama—who, he argues, have risked nothing of substance in their lives.

Like his stemwinder on *The Huffington Post*, the challenge Salter's convention speech encapsulates is the generational showdown this election has become. The baby-boomer speechwriter must come up with an address that explains why voters should choose the elderly McCain's experience and grounding in traditional values over the youthful Gen-X audacity of Obama. In the Salter narrative, the self-sacrificing war hero could not meet a better foil than the Obamamaniacs' narcissistic world of Facebook and YouTube and Scarlett Johansson. But voters aren't likely to base their decision on the past. With the economy on fire, gas prices soaring, and the Bush presidency a disaster, voters are feeling the fierce urgency of now. Even many Republicans concede John McCain may be waging an unwinnable fight.

But there is a consolation prize to be had—or, at the least, a dark irony. Should McCain be steamrolled by the Obama juggernaut, that just might complete the narrative arc that Mark Salter has constructed for his friend and hero and father figure. To be overrun by the iPhone hordes, after all, would simply make John McCain, like Hemingway's Robert Jordan, a figure of beautiful fatalism. And, by extension, Salter himself would finally experience the glorious futility that his own generation was denied. ◆



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*You deserve a factual look at . . .*

# The Golan Heights

## To Whom Do They Belong? Can Israel Survive Without Them?

In a transparent effort to improve his thuggish image, Syria's president Bashar Assad has proposed to meet with Israeli government officials to discuss the possibility of peace. There can be no question that "peace" is not on Mr. Assad's mind, but rather the recovery of the Golan Heights, from which Syria has launched three major wars against Israel.

### What are the facts?

**Historical Background**— The Golan was always part of the Jewish homeland. The Syrian claim to the Golan is tenuous. Syria, as a political entity, did not exist at all until after the first World War. Until then it was just another province in the Ottoman empire, with ill-defined borders. In 1923, in an Anglo/French great power play, the border between Syria and Israel was established. The Golan Heights were ceded to Syria. Even before the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Syrians, having heavily fortified the area, subjected the villages in northern Israel to almost daily shellings, making normal life impossible. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Syria attacked Israel and was defeated. Israel occupied the Golan Heights and in 1981, for all practical purposes, annexed them.

**Syria and its President**—Syria is the most destabilizing influence in the Middle East. It is classified by the U.S. State Department as a narcotic-dealing and terrorist state. Its main fury is directed against Israel, which is perceived as a bulwark of Western influence and civilization, both of which Syria abhors and totally rejects.

Syria's former president, Hafez Assad, was a tyrant, every bit as ruthless and as cunning as his unlamented Iraqi counterpart Saddam Hussein. His son, the current president, is equally despotic, though not quite as smart as his father. Syria is a world center for terrorism. It still harbors Nazi bigwigs, who found welcome there after the World War. Few doubt that Hafez Assad was the mastermind behind the attack on the US Marines barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans were killed. The Syrian government oversees one of the largest narcotics and counterfeiting operations in the world.

**Military Security**—The Golan is a small plateau of about 400 square miles. If it were a part of Syria it would be less than 1% of its territory. But it is of supreme strategic importance to Israel. Its high ground provides early-warning capability, without which Israel—just as in 1948, in 1967, and in 1973—would be subject to surprise attack by the Syrians. Its loss would obligate Israel to stay on constant alert and to maintain a state of readiness and mobilization that would be economically and socially untenable. The Golan, which ranges up to a height of 2300 ft., dominates the Jordan Valley, the lowest point on earth, about 700 ft. below sea level. On the Golan itself, there are only two natural terrain bottlenecks through which tanks can advance. Those choke points are defensible and made possible the repulse of 1400 Syrian tanks that attacked Israel in the 1973 war. But with the Golan in Syrian hands, and without the radar installations that would give Israel warning of any military movements, thousands of tanks—backed up by missiles and airplanes—could overrun Israel in a matter of hours. It would be a strategically impossible situation, especially for a country as small as Israel—smaller than Lake Michigan, smaller by half than San Bernardino County in California. The Golan does not make for perfect defense, but it gives Israel a small, vitally important breathing space for mobilization.

> "With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arab armies could be confident of defeat, and peace would be preserved. To hand back the Golan to Syria at this time would be a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction."

The Golan is the source of over one-third of Israel's fresh water. In 1964, with the Golan in Syrian hands, Syria attempted to divert these headwaters and to cripple Israel's water supply. It is more than likely that, given another opportunity, Syria would once again attempt to destroy Israel's water supply.

Syria has attacked Israel three times across the Golan. Given its implacable hostility, no responsible Israeli leader could possibly return the Golan to Syria. If it were to give up the high ground of the Golan and return to the "death trap" borders of 1967 or anything close to it, Israel, in order to survive, would have to rely on the good will of the Arab states, whose main policy objective is the destruction of Israel. Even though peace-for-peace would be the best solution, how about this: In order to assuage Arab pride, consider granting formal ownership of the Golan to Syria and having Israel—given the precedents of Guantánamo and Hong Kong—lease it back for a hundred-year period. An aggressor will attack only if confident of victory. With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arab armies could be confident of defeat, and peace would be preserved. To hand back the Golan to Syria at this time would be a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction.

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## Stanley Kauffmann on Films

# FLAUNTINGS

The French director Catherine Breillat uses plentiful sex in her films. This is notable not for its candor, a quality that is nowadays general, but for its cunning purpose. Her easy, open attitude toward sex makes the viewer wonder (this seems to be Breillat's plan) what the difference is between her films and pornography. So we consider the context of those naked scenes even more thoroughly, and we decide that the context gives her films a thematic texture that pornography never has. The sex thus emphasizes the non-sexual.

Breillat has done it again in *The Last Mistress*, which she adapted from a novel by the prodigal nineteenth-century author Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly. Paris in 1835 is where it begins, with a visit by a handsome and wealthy young gentleman, Ryno de Marigny, to his longtime mistress, Vellini. He tells her that he is finished with her; he is marrying a young woman, Hermangarde, whom he loves. Vellini, Spanish-born, a Carmen with more money and better taste, is sure that he will be back.

One evening Marigny is with Hermangarde's grandmother. She knows, as does all Paris, about Vellini, and she charmingly but hungrily asks him to recount his affair. This tale is a large part of the film: it takes Marigny all of one night. He fell in love with Vellini when she was married to an elderly English aristocrat. Marigny persisted; she repulsed. Soon the husband challenged him to a duel. Marigny fired in the air, and the husband wounded him in the chest. As the surgeon was taking out the bullet, Vellini burst into the room and licked the blood from his chest.

Thus began their affair. (The English husband disappears.) The two lovers fled to Algeria, where La Vellini gave birth to their child. The child died, and, true to her wild romanticism, Vellini wanted to burn the body in the desert. They did. She and Marigny, seized by emotions they couldn't and didn't want to understand, made love next to the burning body of their child.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Marigny's account winds to its close, and the grandmother relishes it all. The wedding soon takes place. Hermangarde expects fidelity, and Marigny expects it too of himself, but Vellini has other plans. The picture reaches a conclusion that none of the three principals had foreseen.

As the story moves along, the old Breillat question arises through the vivid sex scenes: why isn't this pornography? Definitions of pornography are booby traps, but a sexy film that realizes a serious idea stands apart from exploitation. More: with Breillat, the sex certifies the gravity. Yes, the couplings might have been less explicit, but the immediacy—we can almost scent body odors—becomes a verification. Breillat's film dramatizes the truth that human beings contain more than conventional ideals, which are abstractly calculated. True love in a man or woman does not always prohibit another true love. The film is not about Marigny's mere philandering: he is bound differently but deeply to two women.

This is hardly groundbreaking news about human nature, but Breillat's depiction of it is sensual and affecting. Her sensuality is focused on the people: the luxuriant and gorgeous costumes and settings of the time do not entrance her as they did Jacques Rivette in the comparable *Don't Touch the Axe*. To play Marigny, she has found a young newcomer named Fu'ad Ait Aatou, good enough and handsome enough. Asia Argento, as Vellini, is a firebrand, a woman who is attractive even in non-seductive moments when she is angry or downcast or "off-stage." As Hermangarde, Roxane Mesquida, blonde of course, is softly ornamental.

***THE LAST MISTRESS***
*(IFC)*

***TRUMBO***
*Samuel Goldwyn and Red Envelope*

Breillat, born in 1948, has been making films since 1975 and has taken knocks because of her subjects (not all of those knocks undeserved). I have seen only a few of her pictures, including *Romance* and *Anatomy of Hell*, but *The Last Mistress* seems to crown her method and intent—and, one must ultimately add, her courage.

Dalton Trumbo (1905–1976) was a writer who won the National Book Award for a novel, won an Academy Award for a screenplay, and served ten months in prison for contempt of Congress. A documentary called *Trumbo* expertly provides the outlines of the life in which those three events occurred. The screenplay of the film was derived by Trumbo's son Christopher from the son's play of the same name, which has had several productions. Indeed, some of the actors who were in the play are in the film.

Christopher cannot really be said to have written the play or the screenplay: mostly, he arranged excerpts from his father's letters, which have been published, and those excerpts are interwoven with footage of Trumbo, of which there is a lot. Apparently the play consisted only of the letters. They are rich, but, with the many clips of their author, the film is inevitably richer.



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Trumbo wrote or collaborated on literally innumerable films (an accurate count is impossible), among them *Exodus*, *Hawaii*, and *The Fixer*. He was nominated for an Academy Award for his adaptation of *Kitty Foyle*, and he won the award for *The Brave One* (though he wrote it under a pseudonym during the blacklist days). We might think that he was a born film creature who had found his natural habitat. But, prominent though he was in the field, it was secondary in his mind. When he got his first studio contract at the age of thirty, after he had already published a novel—there were more to come—he wrote to a friend: "I want the movies to subsidize me for a while, until I establish myself as a legitimate writer." This legitimacy became a lesser concern, yet when he was blacklisted in 1947 because of his membership in the Communist Party, he wrote to a friend that he felt joyous to be freed from screenwriting. Allow for his impulse to disguise trouble as triumph, and the comment still discloses the "better" Trumbo that he wanted to believe was within him.

Long sympathetic to the left, Trumbo joined the Communist Party in 1943 and quit in 1946 because, he said, he was too busy to go to meetings. We can infer that he got tired of party machinations. Still, typical of his capacity for gesture, he rejoined the party, for a time, during the blacklist period. As one of the Hollywood Ten—eminent film people who protested the blacklisting and were subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee—he refused to give names of party members or any information to the committee. He was found guilty of contempt and sent to prison in 1947. He viewed his activities all through this era less as a political struggle than as a struggle against the committee's aim to degrade people. In and after prison, he fought to keep them from humbling him. And fought with humor. At one point he said that there were only eighty thousand American communists and that this country was in more danger from the Elks. Factually, the comment is tenuous; yet it stings.

After prison, he survived by writing or collaborating on screenplays under false names or friends' names. Estimates vary from eighteen to thirty screenplays that he was involved in pseudonymously. Much of this documentary's effect lies in the letters that he wrote, in somewhat curlicued but polished style, during those blacklist days. At first we might wince at the prospect of going through another account of those days, but this one is completely engrossing because of Trumbo's writing and spirit.

Trumbo as letter-writer was a bit of a ham, quite aware of it and making the most of it for his pleasure and ours. For instance (this bit is not in the film), near the end of the era he wrote to Albert Maltz, another blacklist victim:

> There will never be an *official* end to the blacklist. Therefore we must *pretend* this is the end . . . and pose not as angry martyrs, as the persecuted, but as good *winners*. In this guise we assume our victory at last, and carry no grudges forward into the future.

In other words, this flamboyantly sincere man says, we must be actors, performing roles in order to protect our best selves and our futures. (Note: the blacklist was "broken" in 1960 by Kirk Douglas and Otto Preminger, who insisted on giving Trumbo screen credit for his work on, respectively, *Spartacus* and *Exodus*.)

This histrionic flavor in Trumbo, though it was heightened by the blacklist days, had been in him throughout his life. One instance, quoted at length in the film, is a letter he wrote to his adolescent son on the subject of masturbation, praising it highly and recommending a book that favors it. (He refers to himself as "a penile virtuoso.") Once again—like his rejoining the Party during the blacklist days—he glories in contravening expectation with a flourish.

The element of theater in Trumbo took over in his person as well. As the years went by and his hair whitened, he wore it long, and he cultivated a swooping moustache, as if to tell anyone who looked at him that he was just a bit larger, more sizable, than one might think. This histrionic quality in Trumbo is embraced by the documentary's director, Peter Askin, and is wonderfully realized by the actors who read extracts from his letters. Joan Allen, Brian Dennehy, Michael Douglas, Paul Giamatti, Nathan Lane, Liam Neeson, David Strathairn, and Donald Sutherland read with empathy, perception, and—especially Sutherland and Neeson—an appropriate music in their voices. Interviews with, among others, the now-venerable Kirk Douglas and Dustin Hoffman, who was in Trumbo's *Papillon*, widen the film's range.

The crux of Trumbo's career is his character. His achievements as a writer, for all his furious energy and imagination, are slim. His novels are forgotten. Most of the films that I remember in the unavoidably incomplete list of sixty in Peter Hanson's biography were either potboilers or Hollywood-serious—potboilers lacquered with mature ideas and with patches of exceptional writing. His antiwar film *Johnny Got His Gun* (from his own novel) is simplistic. His Oscar winner, *The Brave One*, is sentimentality about bullfighting. Even the best films that he wrote or collaborated on, among them *Roman Holiday* and *Papillon*, are not quite first rank. The salient fact about Trumbo's life is that, though he went into screenwriting to support other writing, what it really supported was the creation of his persona—showy but generous, consciously but truly brave, quasi-Edwardian in diction. It is oddly pleasant to know that such a man once existed. ◆

## Jonathan Chait
# DEAD LEFT

**THE SHOCK DOCTRINE:**
**THE RISE OF DISASTER CAPITALISM**
By Naomi Klein
(Metropolitan Books, 576 pp., $28)

It seems like a very long time—though in truth only a few years have passed—since the most sinister force on the planet that the left could imagine was Nike. In 2001, *Time* proclaimed that the anti-globalization movement had become the "defining cause" of a new generation, and that the spokesperson for the cause was the Canadian writer and activist Naomi Klein. For puzzled outsiders grasping to understand why bands of youths had begun following the World Trade Organization wherever it went, brandishing oversize puppets and occasionally smashing up the local Starbucks, Klein was there to explain. She has always downplayed her place within the movement, but in fact her influence is as considerable as her press clippings proclaim. Her achievement, and it is no small feat, has been to revive economicism—and more grandiosely, materialism—as the central locus of left-wing politics.

From the time of Marx, and through the Depression, the left concerned itself primarily with economic inequality. The analysis of injustice in terms of class conflict and the forces of production was the



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canonical one. But the postwar boom—the authors of the Port Huron Statement famously described themselves as "bred in at least modest comfort"—turned the left's attention to foreign policy and national security in the Cold War, and to civil rights, and to feminism. By the 1980s, left-wing politics had withdrawn almost entirely into academia and other liberal enclaves, which it ruthlessly policed for any dissent from the verities of multiculturalist dogma and identity politics.

This evolution can be seen in Klein's own family. Her grandfather was a Marxist fired by Disney in 1941 for trying to organize animators. Her father fled the United States for Canada to avoid service in Vietnam, and joined Physicians for Social Responsibility. Her mother directed the anti-pornography film *Not a Love Story*. And Naomi Klein, like most campus leftists of the 1980s, directed her ideological energies toward the denouncing of various -isms within academia. (She later recalled, with admirable remorse, that she was known as "Miss P.C.")

By the 1990s, Klein had come to realize, like some other campus activists, that off-campus there could be found worse depredations than the canonization of Shakespeare and other dead white males. And the new enemy turned out to be an old one—the original one, in fact: the corporations, and more generally capitalism. Klein set to work on her book *No Logo*, which appeared in 1999. That book wove together much of the new economic activism springing up in the precincts of academia into a withering anti-corporate manifesto. Her indictment had two main counts. The first was that many corporations profited from the cruel treatment of Third World labor. This observation was undeniable, and the publicizing of these evils has produced reforms of which activists can rightly be proud. The second charge was that corporations have encroached upon and monetized every aspect of modern life and culture. Klein wrote that she could envision a future "fascist state where we all salute the logo and have little opportunity for criticism because our newspapers, television stations, Internet servers, streets and retail spaces are all controlled by multinational corporate interests." This aspect of her argument needed a bit more thinking through.

The distinctive thing about Klein's style was that it was very Old Left. She had a classic Marxist-materialist analysis, arguing that economic conditions, rather than bigotry or ideology, are what shape the world. Her interest in culture and in actually existing life under capitalism was somewhat derivative of the Frankfurt School, though not as intellectually sophisticated. Yet she managed to make the old notions feel new, and to capture the ethos of what was being called "the New New Left." And her argument reflected the conviction of the new anti-globalization activists, the children of the "cultural left," that they themselves—and not just workers in Nike factories abroad—were the victims of international corporations.

The 1990s was, for all the obvious reasons, an intensely materialistic era, and Klein came along just in time to make its booms and excesses into fodder for some sort of revival of classical Marxist analysis, which had fallen into disrepair and even into disrepute after the collapse of communism. The publication of *No Logo* serendipitously coincided with the sudden rise of street protests, and the book became a surprise international best-seller. The dearth of leaders in the diffuse anti-globalization cause meant that Naomi Klein became the Tom Hayden of the movement. *The Times* of London deemed her "probably the most influential person under the age of 35 in the world." *The National Post* called her the "New Noam Chomsky," and the *Guardian* announced that "Naomi Klein might just be helping re-invent politics for a new generation."

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And then came September 11. The Islamist attack on the World Trade Center may not have "changed everything," as so many Orwell-wannabes declared, but it, and the ensuing war with secular Iraq, certainly changed the orientation of the left. The locus of evil in the world, even more than during the Cold War, was once again American military power and its use beyond our borders. The new American adversaries were not corporations but individuals—George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz. And they were motivated not by profit, but by ideology. This was not a problem that could be addressed by making the streets of Seattle run brown with Frappuccinos.

But Klein was intellectually unfazed. Rather than re-think the economicist premises of her recent radicalism, she set out to synthesize her old worldview with the post-9/11 world. "I felt it emotionally," she told *The New York Times*, "before I understood it factually." Doggedly connecting the dots, she discovered that the Iraq war was—guess what?—part of the same economic tissue that connected Nike and the World Trade Organization. Klein is nothing if not a totalistic thinker. Everything always adds up, and darkly. The left-wing labor economist Kim Phillips-Fein has written admiringly about Klein's role in seamlessly transforming the anti-globalization movement into the anti-imperialist movement:

> In the wave of panicked reaction that followed the disaster, suddenly it seemed that the movement might disappear once more.... Almost alone among political journalists, Klein has devoted herself to writing about the war against Iraq as a political project driven by neoliberal ideology and economic interest—a natural extension of the corporate dominance of the 1990s, instead of a radical break.

So Klein went through the transition from intellectual guru of the movement against Starbucks to intellectual guru of the movement against the Pentagon, and came away as influential as ever. She remains the darling of the left in the United States, where she writes for *The Nation* and *The Huffington Post*, and abroad, where she is even more popular. A poll of readers of *Prospect* and *Foreign Policy* in 2005 ranked her eleventh on a list of the hundred most influential public intellectuals in the world. And we can see the culmination of her intellectual synthesis in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. The reception accorded this book has been staggering. It was a *New York Times* bestseller, a finalist for distinguished prizes, a favorite of "best book" lists in the newspapers. It has even been made into a short film. It has been reviewed favorably in *The New York Times*, and hyperbolically elsewhere. *In These Times* called it "The New Road to Serfdom"—that is, the left-wing equivalent of the classic right-wing Hayekian tract. *The San Francisco Chronicle* said it "may have revealed the master narrative of our time." Not bad for a marginal dissenter.

*The Shock Doctrine* has a single, uncomplicated explanation for everything that ails us. It identifies the fundamental driving force of the last three decades to be the worldwide spread of free-market absolutism as it was formulated by Milton Friedman and the department of economics at the University of Chicago. The free marketers, Klein argues, understand full well that the public does not support their policies, which she summarizes as "the elimination of the public sphere, total liberation for corporations and skeletal social spending." And so they have decided that the free-market program can be implemented only when the public has been disoriented by wars, coups, natural disasters, and the like. The "shock doctrine" is the conservative plan to implement pro-corporate policies through the imposition and exploitation of mass trauma.

Klein cites a passage written by Friedman that "best summarizes the shock doctrine":

> Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.

Much of the moral weight of Klein's indictment rests upon the morbid pleasure her subjects appear to take in the immiseration that permits their success. Klein observes that in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Friedman described the ruin of the New Orleans school system thusly: "This is a tragedy. It is also an opportunity to radically reform the education system." On the very next page, she calls Friedman's plan "the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities." The reader is meant to recall Friedman's use of the word "opportunity," and forget his use of the word "tragedy." Reading Klein, you might almost conclude that Friedman devised the hurricane.

Klein repeatedly implies that there is something immoral about using crises to advance the right-wing agenda without explaining why this is so. After all, Friedman wanted to overhaul the New Orleans public education system because he believed, rightly or wrongly, that vouchers would work better. If you thought your house was horribly designed, and a tornado flattened it, would you rebuild it exactly as before?

The notion that crises create fertile terrain for political change, far from being a ghoulish doctrine unique to free-market radicals, is a banal and ideologically universal fact. (Indeed, it began its dubious modern career in the orbit of Marxism, where it was known as "sharpening the contradictions.") Entrenched interests and public opinion tend to run against sweeping reform, good or bad, during times of peace and prosperity. Liberals could not have enacted the New Deal without the Great Depression. Communist revolutions have generally come about in the wake of wars. The liberal economist Victor R. Fuchs once wrote that "national health insurance will probably come to the United States in the wake of a major change in the political climate, the kind of change that often accompanies a war, a depression, or large-scale civil unrest."

Fuchs did not mean that the public would never accept universal health insurance unless they had been brutalized into doing so. Nor was his observation evidence that he longed for disaster to befall the United States. Most American liberals today would admit that the sorry state of the American economy, foreign policy, and political life has created a golden opportunity for progressive reform. There is nothing odious about this. Yet Klein takes analogous observations from conservatives as proof that the right "prays for crisis the way drought-stricken farmers pray for rain."

Klein locates the beginnings of the shock doctrine in Chile, where in 1973 a military coup led by Pinochet displaced a democratically elected socialist government, and implemented economic policies urged upon him by Friedman and other Chicago School free-marketers. Chile offers the closest example of a case study that fits Klein's thesis. But even here the facts do not fit quite as tightly as she would like. Through most of her narrative, Klein depicts Pinochet as a pure puppet of Friedman. "For the first year and a half," she writes, "Pinochet



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faithfully followed the Chicago rules." But a half-dozen pages later, while explaining away the impressive economic growth that followed under Pinochet, she writes that "it's clear that Chile never was the laboratory of 'pure' free markets that its cheerleaders claimed." More generally, she seems incapable of understanding that authoritarianism of the sort represented by Pinochet may be as moved by a lust for power as by a lust for profits. They are not the same phenomenon.

From that starting point, Klein proceeds to interpret most of the events of the last thirty years as repetitions of the same inexorable pattern: elites forcing laissez-faire policies upon unwilling citizens. Her interpretive method is an extremely crude sort of Marxist economicism. The Tiananmen Square uprising, in Klein's telling, was not a pro-democracy movement so much as an explosion of opposition to privatization, and Beijing crushed the movement not in the service of autocracy but in the service of neoliberalism. "It wasn't Communism [Deng] was protecting with his crackdown," she writes, "but capitalism."

Klein's model leaves little room for the non-economic varieties of conflict, such as ethnic or sectarian strife. "Some of the most infamous human rights violations of this era," she observes, "which have tended to be viewed as sadistic acts carried out by antidemocratic regimes, were in fact either committed with the deliberate intent of terrorizing the public or actively harnessed to prepare the ground for the introduction of radical free-market 'reforms.'" One example Klein cites in her list is the U.S. intervention in Kosovo. But the human rights violation that she deplores was not the ethnic cleansing of Albanians, it was the American response. And what motivated the American attempt to stop the mass atrocity? Capitalism, of course: "The NATO attack on Belgrade in 1999 created the conditions for rapid privatizations in the former Yugoslavia—a goal that predated the war." (Klein assures her readers that economics was not the "sole motivator" for the war, but her analysis makes no room for any such complication.)

Almost nothing can confound Klein's cookie cutter. You might have thought that, say, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is rooted in non-monetary things such as land, religion, security, and ideology. But it is not, as the doctrinaire Klein confidently explains. Israel made a peace deal with the Palestinians in 1993 because "Israeli corporations were tired of being held back by war," and thought that if Israel made peace, it would "be perfectly positioned to be the Middle East's free-trade hub." But then what changed? The answer is the Israeli economy: "the flipping of Israel's export economy from one based on traditional goods and high technology to one disproportionately dependent on selling expertise and devices related to counterterrorism." Klein takes an unusual view of the causal relationship. Rather than terrorism instigating the rise of Israel's counterterrorism sector, Klein sees the relationship working in reverse: "the rapid expansion of the high-tech security economy created a powerful appetite inside Israel's wealthy and most powerful sectors for abandoning peace in favor of fighting a continual, and continuously expanding, War on Terror." So Israel decided to provoke bomb blasts in its buses and pizzerias largely—again, she dutifully concedes that it was not the sole factor—because building blast walls and bomb detectors became more profitable than living in peace.

The heart of Klein's book is her analysis of the Iraq war, which she regards as the state-of-the-art application, the definitive demonstration, of the shock doctrine. In Klein's telling, the war is merely a forcible expansion of economic globalization. "The architects of the invasion," she instructs, "had unleashed ferocious violence because they could not crack open the closed economies of the Middle East by peaceful means." Why, then, did Bush settle on Iraq, as opposed to some other closed Middle Eastern economy? Klein argues that other targets were indeed considered, but Bush chose Iraq owing to its "good central location for military bases," the American military's familiarity with the terrain from the Gulf war, and the fact that "Saddam's use of chemical weapons on his own people made him easy to hate."

Saddam's record of aggression of years of defying U.N. weapons inspectors does not make the list. "Saddam did not pose a threat to U.S. security," she writes, "but he did pose a threat to U.S. energy companies, since he had recently signed contracts with a Russian oil giant and was in negotiations with France's Total." Of course, Russia and France received contracts because they were working to undermine the sanctions regime and containment of Iraq. Why didn't Bush do the smart capitalist thing and simply make a deal with Saddam to drop the sanctions and cut American oil companies in on Iraq's oil reserves? Klein does not say.

It seems a little ridiculous to have to point out that Iraq is not exactly a new outpost of unfettered capitalism, with McDonald's and Exxon stations beckoning customers on every corner. The American master plan to transform Iraq into an "Arabic Singapore" has not worked out too well. But in full defiance of everything that we know about post-war Iraq, Klein proceeds to argue that what might superficially appear to be a total failure is, in fact, the successful culmination of the war's purposes. After the invasion, she explains, local democracy and inter-sectarian peace sprang out around the land. "Freedom," she remarks, "was becoming a reality." And from the perspective of the Bush administration, this was a problem. A truly democratic Iraq would never accept the laissez-faire economy that Washington wanted, and which was the entire purpose of the war. "So," Klein deduces, "Washington abandoned its democratic promises and instead ordered increases in the shock level."

Most critics of the war believe the notion of exporting democracy to a hostile Arab country was doomed in its conception. Some war supporters counter that the occupation could have succeeded, but bungling and incompetence caused it to fail. Klein is staking out a third, esoteric, highly original position. She says that the occupation could have succeeded, but the Bush administration *did not want it to succeed*. She is explicit about this:

> Had the Bush administration kept its promise to hand over power quickly to an elected Iraqi government, there is every chance that the resistance would have remained small and containable, rather than becoming a countrywide rebellion. But keeping that promise would have meant sacrificing the economic agenda behind the war, something that was never going to happen.

Never? Ten pages later Klein concedes that, starting in December 2006, the Pentagon pulled a "dramatic about-face" and decided to re-open Iraq's state factories. Her cheerful insouciance in the face of such inconvenient facts points to an odd, slightly endearing quality of hers: she is conscientious enough to provide readers with facts that blow her thesis to smithereens, yet at the same time she is deluded enough not to notice the rubble of her thinking on the floor. So Klein makes a big deal about the comic but stillborn efforts by some Republican ideologues to transform Iraq into a flat-tax paradise, but she also notes that very little privatization actually took place in Iraq, and indeed that the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) had just three staffers devoted to privatizing Iraqi state industries. You would think



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this latter fact would undermine her belief that privatizing Iraq's economy was the central goal of the war. Alas, no. She thinks it just goes to show that "the CPA itself was too privatized to privatize Iraq."

So Klein attributes the failure to privatize Iraq to the CPA's incompetence, but she deems every other apparent failure to be a deliberate plan to foster chaos. To make this case, Klein runs through every one of the administration's post-war mistakes and explains why it was no mistake at all. Paul Bremer, the director of reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, decided to purge Baathists from the Iraqi government not because they were Baathists but because they were government employees. De-Baathification, Klein writes, "had little to do with anti-Saddamism and everything to do with free-market fervor." She further insists that the widespread episodes of looting in early 2003 "cannot be dismissed as mere oversights," but were part of the American plan to dismantle the Iraqi state.

With the pseudo-clarity of a conspiracy theorist, Klein dismisses out of hand the possibility of incompetence. There were memos warning the Army of looting, she ominously notes—scanting the possibility that bureaucratic lethargy, rather than conscious intent, prevented the memos' warnings from being acted upon at ground level. That widespread bungling and mismanagement also followed Hurricane Katrina strikes Klein as proof of intentionality. "The fact that exactly the same errors as those made in Iraq were instantly repeated in New Orleans," she remarks, "should put to rest the claim that Iraq's occupation was merely a string of mishaps and mistakes marked by incompetence and lack of oversight."

Like every conspiracy theory, Klein's account of the fate of the world finally lacks internal logic. She points to one instance of American soldiers dismembering Iraqi passenger planes, inflicting "$100 million worth of damage to Iraq's national airline—which was one of the first assets to be put on the auction block in an early and contentious partial privatization." If the point of the war was to hand control of Iraq's state assets to American corporations, wouldn't American troops be protecting those assets instead of destroying them?

But her most explosive charge is that Bush and his cabal are not merely the puppets of war profiteers, but war profiteers themselves. "Key Bush officials have maintained their interests in the disaster capitalism complex," thereby "allowing them to simultaneously profit from the disasters they help unleash." Klein provides two examples of such conflicts of interest. The first is that Donald Rumsfeld maintained his stock in Gilead Sciences, which holds the patent for Tamiflu, even while serving as defense secretary. Get it? Rumsfeld would stand to profit from a flu pandemic. But surely you don't have to be an admirer of Rumsfeld to doubt that he would engineer an outbreak of a deadly virus in order to fatten his stock portfolio. (Indeed, one suspects that even if Rumsfeld tried to pull off such a dastardly scheme, he would probably wind up creating a cure for the flu by mistake and render Tamiflu worthless.)

The other piece of data that Klein cites to support her charge that Bush administration officials profit from the disasters that they cause is Vice President Cheney's holdings in Halliburton. "When he leaves office in 2009 and is able to cash in his Halliburton holdings," she charges, "Cheney will have the opportunity to profit extravagantly from the stunning improvement in Halliburton's fortunes." This is a spectacular accusation—that the driving force behind the Iraq war stands to gain millions of dollars from it. You might wonder why John Kerry did not make this an issue in 2004, or why liberal pundits have not crusaded against Cheney's blatant self-dealing. The answer, of course, is that it is completely untrue. Cheney has signed a legally binding agreement to donate to charity any increase in his Halliburton stock. (Honest—you can look this up on factcheck.org.) Lord knows Rumsfeld and Cheney have committed enough actual misdeeds not to need indicting with imaginary ones.

Klein's strength as a writer is her interest in the ground level of things. Free-trade advocates rely heavily on abstract theory, lecturing us on comparative advantage and the relative virtues of Portuguese wine versus English wool; but Klein, no armchair radical, jets off to wretched places in the Third World and paints a picture of the reality of free trade in chilling detail. That picture ought to give pause to the most committed free-trader, even if she is hardly the only one to have noted these consequences. Yet when it comes to the right-wingers who constitute her book's main subject, Klein's reportorial spirit is nowhere to be found.

Klein's relentless materialism is not the only thing driving her to see conservatives merely as corporate puppets. She pays shockingly (but, given her premises, unsurprisingly) little attention to right-wing ideas. She recognizes that neoconservatism sits at the heart of the Iraq war project, but she does not seem to know what neoconservatism is; and she makes no effort to find out. Her ignorance of

## Extraordinary Rendition

I.

I gave you back my claim on the mining town
and the rich vein we once worked,
the tumble-down
from a sluice-box that irked

you so much, the narrow-gauge
that opened up to one and all
when it ran out at the landing-stage
beyond the Falls.

I gave you back oak ties,
bully-flitches, the hand-hewn cross-beams
from which hung hard tack

in a burlap bag that, I'd surmise,
had burst its seams
the last night we lay by the old spur track.

II.

You gave me back your frown
and the most recent responsibility you'd shirked
along with something of your renown
for having jumped from a cage just before it jerked

to a standstill, your wild rampage
shot through with silver falderals,
the speed of that falling cage
and the staidness of our canyon walls.

You gave me back lake-skies,
pulley-glitches, gully-pitches, the reflected gleams
of two tin plates and mugs in the shack,

the echoes of love-sighs
and love-screams
our canyon walls had already given back.

**PAUL MULDOON**



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the American right is on bright display in one breathtaking sentence:

> Only since the mid-nineties has the intellectual movement, led by the right-wing think-tanks with which [Milton] Friedman had long associations—Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institute—called itself "neoconservative," a worldview that has harnessed the full force of the U.S. military machine in the service of a corporate agenda.

Where to begin? First, neoconservative ideology dates not from the 1990s but from the 1960s, and the label came into widespread use in the 1970s. Second, while neoconservatism is highly congenial to corporate interests, it is distinctly less so than other forms of conservatism. The original neocons, unlike traditional conservatives, did not reject the New Deal. They favor what they now call "national greatness" over small government. And their foreign policy often collides head-on with corporate interests: neoconservatives favor saber-rattling in places such as China or the Middle East, where American corporations frown on political risk, and favor open relations and increased trade. Moreover, the Heritage Foundation has always had an uneasy relationship with neoconservatism. (Russell Kirk delivered a famous speech at the Heritage Foundation in which he declared that "not seldom has it seemed as if some eminent neoconservatives mistook Tel Aviv for the capital of the United States.") And the Cato Institute is not neoconservative at all. It was virulently opposed to the Iraq war in particular, and it opposes interventionism in foreign policy in general.

Finally, there is the central role that Klein imputes to her villain Friedman, both in this one glorious passage and throughout her book. In her telling, he is the intellectual guru of the shock doctrine, whose minions have carried out his corporatist agenda from Santiago to Baghdad. Klein calls the neocon movement "Friedmanite to the core," and identifies the Iraq war as a "careful and faithful application of unrestrained Chicago School ideology" over which Friedman presided. What she does not mention—not once, not anywhere, in her book—is that Friedman argued against the Iraq war from the beginning, calling it an act of "aggression."

It ought to be morbidly embarrassing for a writer to discover that the central character of her narrative turns out to oppose what she identifies as the apotheosis of his own movement. And Klein's mistake exposes the deeper flaw of her thesis. Friedman opposed the war because he was a libertarian, and libertarian conservatism is not the same thing as neoconservatism. Nor are the interests of corporations always, or even usually, served by war.

What makes Klein's thesis so odd, and so awful, is that in fact there is an unlimited supply of raw material, an abundant basis in reality, for the sorts of arguments that she wants to make. The last two decades certainly have seen the global spread of absolutist free-market ideology. Many of the newest adherents of this creed are dictators who have learned that they can harness the riches of capitalism without permitting the freedoms once thought to flow automatically from it. In the United States, the power of labor unions has withered, and prosperity has increasingly come to be defined as gross domestic product or the rise of the stock market, with the actual living standards of the great mass of the population an afterthought. Corporations, which can relocate nearly anywhere around the world, have used their flexibility as a cudgel against workers, who do not enjoy the privileges of mobility. Domestic policy has aggressively sharpened income inequalities, and corporations have enjoyed unfettered influence to a degree not seen in a hundred years. And the president did start a war without paying the slightest bit of attention to the country that he would be left occupying or how its people would react.

All these things are true. And all these things are enormous outrages and significant problems. It's just that they are not the same outrage or the same problem. And Naomi Klein's relentless lumping together of all her ideological adversaries in the service of a monocausal theory of the world ultimately renders her analysis perfect nonsense. ◆

## Frank Kermode
# THE ART OF NOTICING

**HOW FICTION WORKS**
By James Wood
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
208 pp., $24)

THIS ADMIRABLE BOOK IS, among other things, a successful attempt to replace E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* as an accessible guide to the mechanics of fiction. Without losing sight of its promise to address the common reader rather than the specialist, *How Fiction Works* is much more sophisticated than Forster's book, which is now eighty years old, but still, in a rather peculiar way, what James Wood says it is, namely "canonical." Some of its observations—on the difference between story and plot, and between flat and round characters—are still quoted even though more subtle discriminations have long been available, and Wood has thought keenly and profitably about such matters. He also benefits, as Forster did not, from wide reading in contemporary fiction.

Forster was not exactly lazy—he undertook to read or re-read usefully some classic novels, and he consulted Virginia Woolf—but his contemporaries (of whom, having lived so long, he had a great many) are inadequately represented. Gide and Henry James get some attention, but only to be found wanting, whereas novels by Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and Norman Matson, little known even in 1927, are admitted as writers of fantasy, along with Joyce's *Ulysses*, described as "a dogged attempt to cover the universe with mud." As to the famous dichotomies mentioned above—flat/round, story/plot—they have been scorned by critics, if not by students, for almost a century. Wood's book offers updated versions; flat characters will never be the same again.

Wood's conversational style is a modern equivalent of Forster's, but for all its wit and ease of manner, this is a much more substantial study. To be fair, one must add that Wood has access to serious studies of fiction and its workings that have become available since Forster's day—mostly in the last half-century, which witnessed the birth of "narratology." Some "narratological" studies are pretentious and dull, but some are not. Wood announces that his favorite twentieth-century critics of the novel are Viktor Shklovsky and Roland Barthes, but he cites them largely in order to differ from them, gently deploring the difficulties they present to the "common reader." In a longer book (which this one ought to have

*Frank Kermode's new book, E. M. Forster and Other 20th Century Novelists, will be published by Orion in December.*



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been) we would hope to learn why these critics won his favor in the first place. In this one he does usefully borrow some of Barthes's ideas, while contesting his opinion that "realism" has nothing to do with reality, being nothing but a system of conventional codes. He comments, but not as extensively as he usefully could, on *S/Z*, Barthes's remarkable study of how a novella by Balzac works, but he says only a few words on Shklovsky's essays—for instance, the study called "How *Don Quixote* Is Made," a title perhaps echoed in Wood's own.

It may be that few readers will much regret that Wood prefers to do his own thinking, addressing primary texts and readers less anxious to engage with Barthes's neologisms and Shklovsky's preoccupation with the notion of defamiliarization—his belief that it is not the business of fiction (or any art) to provide something conveniently easy to recognize, but rather to create a particular and probably surprising perception, to transform the ordinary in ways he illustrates brilliantly with examples from that well-known realist Tolstoy. It is true that some of Wood's critical procedures somewhat resemble Shklovsky's, and his largely unexplained interest in the Russian author may result from that similarity.

Wood wants to ask some "essential questions": "Is realism real? How do we define a successful metaphor? What is a character?… What is point of view, and how does it work?" He begins with "point of view" and the case, not so special as some think, of the "unreliable narrator." To tell a story from the point of view of somebody who does not understand it, or for other reasons misrepresents it, may seem merely perverse, but unreliability can be a matter of art. Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* and Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* are celebrated examples, and Wood adds Italo Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno* to the list. In these instances unreliability is of course intended, and necessary to the novel's design, though it may well happen that events or things not intended to contribute to the narrator's unreliability are misrepresented by accident. With Ford's novel, which contains a good many mistakes, there remains the question as to which of them are intended by the author and which are not. In such cases, the author's errors can of course be attributed to the character. But in fact all narrators, even of the more usual "omniscient" variety, are in some measure unreliable, missing things out, reporting them wrongly.

So much is obvious. More interesting is the point that "omniscience"—the assumption that reliable narrators know all about everything—often, or possibly always, falls short of real omniscience. It comes closest when it employs "free indirect style," a subject to which Wood, though not the first in this field, has given close and rewarding attention. Using this style, the author claims to be recording, with comment, the unspoken thought of a character. Technically, the next step from this device toward the omniscient recording of all his thoughts and feelings is "stream of consciousness," which is frequently regarded as a modernist innovation but may be nothing much more than the re-invention of the soliloquy.

As an example of free indirect style "at its most powerful," Wood offers this: "Ted watched the orchestra through stupid tears"—where, as he correctly writes, the word "stupid" is the clue that shows the sentence to be what is sometimes known as "f.i.d.," free indirect discourse or style. Without that word "stupid," it would just be "standard reported thought." And with it, interpretation gets trickier. Wood observes that the author would hardly call a character stupid merely because he listened to some music in a concert hall; the sense of the word (as in other instances of the device) is transferred from the author to Ted, who is embarrassed that he is weeping. In simple reported internal monologue, Ted is now thinking: "Stupid to be crying at this silly piece by Brahms." So now both the author and the character have a share in the word, with the consequent enhancement of the potential meaning of the text.

This argument is both clearer and more complex than a brief summary can convey, but I hope it is possible to deduce from it the point that Wood is making about free indirect style. It may also appear that this invented example (rather on the lines of Forster's little explanatory inventions) may be misleading. "Stupid" is said of the tears, not of the character, and the question may be whether they are stupid because they are irrelevant to Ted's situation—has some anterior grief rendered cruel or ironical his presence at a concert, on an occasion when no music could be relevant? Or, as you like it: it is part of the argument that such opacities and ambiguities are valuable in fiction. Anyway, when Wood returns to this example later in the book he is wrong to say that "the reader had no difficulty in assigning 'stupid' to the character himself." Still, as he rightly maintains, "it is useful to watch good writers make mistakes."

The difficulty arises from the fact that, as Wood remarks, free indirect discourse is close to irony (and to ambiguity). He writes at some length about *What Maisie Knew*, in which we are offered a child's view of adult corruption: We "live inside her confusion." Maisie knows a lot, but not enough. In a long extract from the novel—a passage Wood particularly admires—she puzzles over her relationships with two governesses, and also with the dead child of one of them, a girl of Maisie's own age. Maisie meditates on the status of the dead girl, Clara Matilda, "who was in heaven and yet, embarrassingly, also in Kensal Green," a London cemetery, which she had visited with the dead girl's mother to see her "little huddled grave." "James's genius," we are told, "gathers in one word: 'embarrassingly,'" and Wood asks whose word it is.

He argues that it is Maisie's, embarrassed to witness adult grief, a little afraid of it; and he develops this theme with his usual resource. And yet the embarrassment surely arises less from the confusion that Wood identifies than from a much more obvious childish puzzle, of a sort that adults rather than children can find words for. Common sense says the dead girl is in Kensal Green, whereas conventional religion places her in heaven: how can she be in two places at once? It is, or it was, a common problem for children. Maisie's reaction arises from ambiguities in the cultural code that Wood inherits from Barthes. He rightly comments that "huddled" must be James's own word, but he thinks that Maisie might, by a stroke of Jamesian genius, have used the word "embarrassingly" to describe her own confusion. Yet it seems virtually impossible for it to be anything but an adult's way of describing a child's commonplace eschatological difficulty.

Commentary of the kind here offered will very often give rise to conflicting readings, and I do not often find myself in serious dispute with the author. Wood's book is full of acceptable insights on a long list of novelists and topics—on Naipaul, whose *A House for Mr. Biswas* is a particular favorite; on Chekhov and Giovanni Verga; on Nabokov (good at metaphor); on John Updike (not a favorite—we know from Wood's attack on him in *The Broken Estate* that he is judged incapable of that Jamesian "embarrassingly"). Wood takes seriously the duty of criticism to judge.

There is a problem that he regards as peculiarly American: the conflict between the desire of writers to use all their linguistic resources and their need to repre-



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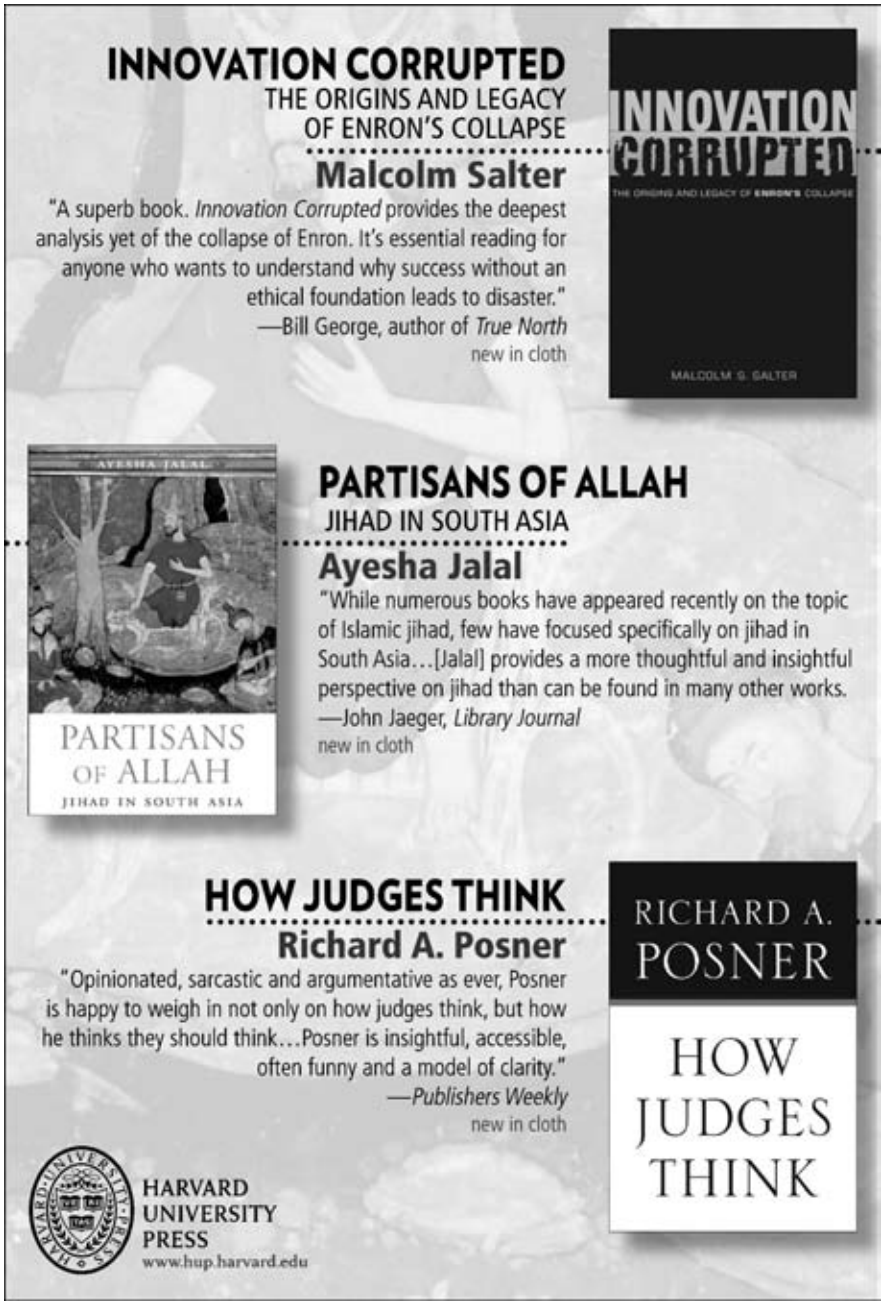
sent in a plausible way the language and perceptions to be expected of characters less amply endowed. Wood here judges Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace, and Don DeLillo to fall short. Even the admired Saul Bellow is gently reproved for letting Tommy Wilhelm, in *Seize the Day*, perceive the beauty of the ash on old Mr. Rappaport's cigar, though Wood himself perceives it and is indeed so fond of it that later in the book he pays it a return visit.

Bellow is, for good reason, one of Wood's heroes, but his main hero is Flaubert, the inventor of an authentic modern realism. A passage from *L'Education sentimentale*, inserted to provide a demonstration of "modern realist narration," is Wood at his best. It concerns detail, whether included or brilliantly omitted. "How superb and magnificently isolate these details are—the women yawning, the unopened newspapers, the washing quivering in the warm air." Wood gives many warm and original pages to the matter of detail: "Literature makes us better noticers of life; we get to practice on life itself; which in turn makes us better readers of detail in literature; which in turn makes us better readers of life. And so on and on." Having noticed, one may praise with discrimination.

The ability to praise convincingly, to communicate disinterested respect and affection, is a rare critical gift. It is important to note that Wood, who is often denounced as too scathing, has the gift of intelligent praise in abundance. It may declare itself in a single phrase: Muriel Spark's novels are "fiercely composed and devoutly starved." Marilynne Robinson in *Gilead* calls a grandfather's grave "his weedy little mortality patch," and Wood simply exclaims, "How fine that is"—it seems enough just to say so. But a strange sentence in Woolf's *The Waves* ("The day waves yellow with all its crops") haunts him and demands lengthy explication. And a wonderful sentence in Philip Roth's great novel *Sabbath's Theater* requires pages of thrilled comment. The admired beauty may not be simply of language but of characterological invention: Anna Karenina, having met Vronsky on the train, notices that her husband, who has come to meet her at the station, has undergone a physical change: "Why have his ears become like that?"

A long section on character in the novel does not forget Forster, but we read him along with Barthes on the "reality effect" and are asked to consider a great many admired novelists—Diderot, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Conrad, Proust, Saramago, Hamsun, Thomas Bernhard, Svevo, Kafka, Beckett, Ralph Ellison, Ian McEwan—and others not so unequivocally admired (Iris Murdoch, "who so wanted to create free characters and so often failed"). Wood's section on language and metaphor contains one of his rare falls from omniscience: "If prose is to be as well-written as poetry—the old modernist hope . . . ," he begins; but the modernist hope, as expressed by Ford Madox Ford and Ezra Pound, was that poetry should be as well-written as prose.

Yet Wood is right to say we should read "musically, testing the precision and rhythm of a sentence, listening for the almost inaudible rustle of historical association clinging to the hems of modern words, attending to patterns, repetitions, echoes, deciding why a metaphor is successful and another is not." Wood has himself written a novel, but here he makes, by example, the point that critical prose should also be as well written as the prose of the best novels. The critic's critic is tempted to fill his review of *How Fiction Works* with quotations, and in the end may well repeat too frequently the author's comment on Marilynne Robinson, "How fine." There have been many books in recent years on the making of fiction, but I know of none (except perhaps *S/Z*, its admired anti-realist opponent) that can offer as much serious instruction as this masterly essay. ◆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# Alexander Nemser
# LOW TRUTHS

**GORKY'S TOLSTOY AND OTHER REMINISCENCES: KEY WRITINGS BY AND ABOUT MAXIM GORKY**
Translated by Donald Fanger
(Yale University Press, 320 pp., $30)

Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov, the future Maxim Gorky, was born in 1868 in Nizhni Novgorod on the Volga River, and grew up in what he later described in his melancholy, violent autobiography as "that close-knit, suffocating little world of pain and suffering where the ordinary Russian man in the street used to live, and where he lives to this day." It was the world of the provincial petty-bourgeois—neighbors cut the tails off each other's cats and sons besieged their fathers' houses, knocking all night on the doors with fists and clubs.

Gorky was struck from the start by the chaos and the carelessness of the life that he saw around him. Many of the most lyrical passages in his autobiography describe the silences that followed the savage outbursts of his relatives. He remembered his lazy cousin Sasha, whose two rows of teeth were "the only interesting thing about him": "I liked to sit close to him," Gorky wrote, "neither of us speaking for a whole hour, and watching the black crows circling and wheeling in the red evening sky around the golden cupolas of the Church of the Assumption, diving down to earth and draping the fading sky with a black net.... A scene like this fills the heart with sweet sadness and leaves you content to say nothing." The cruelty around him made him want to embellish and to correct what he saw. In his best work, however, he told his stories without ornament.

Literarily speaking, Gorky was never a true "realist": inventing heroes who were better than life, he placed them in realistic settings and convinced his readers and himself that he was a "chronicler of everyday events." According to the poet Vladislav Khodasevich, "he himself half-believed in that half-truth all his life." Gorky had a tendency toward a broad, bright clarity that blurred life into myth. "In Gorky's books," Victor Shklovsky noted, "things take on an inflated quality without being enlarged out of proportion.... It's like a card game played by some officers sitting in the basket of an observation balloon a mile up in the air."

Gorky may have been his own greatest character, but the story of the character Gorky is one of the most disappointing and upsetting in modern literature. It is, in fact, the sort of story against which Gorky himself protested all his life: a story of disillusionment and "low truths," of a revolution wildly off its course.

In his youth, Aleksei Peshkov tramped numberless miles all over Russia—the Caspian Sea, Astrakhan, the Mozdosk steppe, Bessarabia—and worked an endless series of odd jobs: ragman, stevedore, icon seller. In each new town, he would show up with a change of underwear and a small suitcase full of books, and dazzle his listeners with stories of the bizarre men he had met. At the age of twenty, he spent his last money on a pistol and shot himself in the chest. He survived, but he carried the bullet in his lung for another forty years. His friend Leonid Andreyev later told him, "You know yourself that a man who hasn't tried to kill himself isn't worth much."

In 1892, he published his first story in a newspaper in Tiflis under the pseudonym Maxim Gorky, which means "Maxim the Bitter." It was the age of invented names—Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin—as the thought of revolution promised every individual a chance at a new history. When, in 1898, his first collection of stories was published in two volumes, Gorky was launched into an iconic celebrity, his picture appearing on matchboxes, postcards, and cigarette packs. Here was the author as "emissary from the anonymous masses," the representative of the "Lower Depths," as he later named his most famous play, which depicted the destitution, both physical and spiritual, of prostitutes and minor thieves. For two decades, Gorky was the object of adoration by many Russian readers, and even took on the image of a kind of people's protector. (On Gorky's fiftieth birthday, a convict sent him this request from prison: "Dear writer!... I am in prison for murdering my wife, whom I killed on the fifth day after we married because she [followed by a series of extremely frank details].... Would it be possible to obtain an amnesty for me?" ) In fact, Gorky's immediate ancestors—particularly his grandfather, who owned a dye factory—were of a higher class than those of Chekhov, whose grandfathers were both serfs. Across Russia, false Gorkys began turning up wearing his trademark long overcoat and boasting a collection of anecdotes about the heroic outcasts they had known.

An obsessive corrector, Gorky would sit for hours with a blue pencil annotating manuscripts—his own and everyone else's. Finishing a newspaper, he would cover the pages with additions and alterations, then throw it away. A conservative group once sent him a rope noose and a threatening note. He threw out the noose and corrected the note in blue pencil, so that the rabid ideas remained but were expressed more clearly. No one ever saw him sleep. His bed was as neat as a hospital bed. He stayed up nights, making himself a medium for grammar.

His memory was prodigious. Many who knew Gorky recorded his miraculous ability to remember the names of streets and towns that he had visited decades before, and to recall the plots of hundreds of novels by writers whose names had already been forgotten. He was astonished when someone once asked him how he knew a certain fact. "How could anyone not know?" he asked. "There was an article about it in *The Messenger of Europe* for 1887, the October issue."

Gorky appeared bearing tales of hoodlums and tramps, but also scraps and pamphlets of anarchist ideas charged with revolutionary hopes. His financial support, much of which came from his own royalties, bolstered Lenin and the Bolsheviks from 1903 until their seizure of power in 1917. Wishing to believe all his life that human reality could be improved and even perfected, Gorky achieved a greatness that was ultimately social, not artistic; at his best he was a grand-scale inspiration for a worldwide cult of human progress and social struggle. He was a famously mesmerizing raconteur, but many who heard his stories in person were disappointed when they read them. He was himself attracted to power and the raw energy of self-assertion, and idolized men who tried to remake the world.

When Gorky met Tolstoy in 1900, the two men were the most famous writers in Russia. Tolstoy was long into his religious "conversion," having abandoned literature

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and positioned himself as the wise, troubled savior of Russia, preaching nonviolence and personal spirituality, dressing as a peasant, and receiving pilgrims and truth seekers from all corners of Russia and the world. Gorky was a young writer in search of a literary idol. His memoir of Tolstoy is the centerpiece of Donald Fanger's fascinating new volume of translations.

The memoir, which Fanger translates for the first time in its entirety, is torn-edged, surprisingly vicious, unpredictable, and empathic to the point of being almost an X-ray of a spirit. Composed of forty-four fragments recording anecdotes and quotations, as well as an unfinished letter written on the eve of Tolstoy's death, the memoir is held together by contradictions—the galactic attraction of Tolstoy's charm and self-regard against the willful slyness of his half-hearted preaching; Tolstoy's insistence on peasant simplicity against his silent, agonized consideration of complexity, human and divine; the tenderness for the man, so vast that Gorky almost falls into it like a sea, against Gorky's own defensive animosity.

Always fascinated by the way people talked to and about God, Gorky caught in Tolstoy's preaching the wavering false note of the non-believer. His memoir is an alternative gospel relating the teachings and contradictions of a god-like man, who himself rewrote the Gospels in search of a god who could save him. It is clearly a hagiography, but one that goes out of its way to emphasize that its subject was not a saint. In this, Gorky was challenging the Tolstoy cult, which insisted on the authentic martyrdom of its patron saint. It was not for his gigantic faith in God that Gorky admired Tolstoy, but for his gigantic faith in Count Tolstoy. Searching the world for a spiritual mentor, a figurehead for the theory of men's elevation that would enable his country to transcend the darkness of the past and the mindless cruelty and ignorance of the present, Gorky found Tolstoy, who must have appeared to him as the incarnation of his hopes.

Gorky's literary portraits capture the culture of reading in which their subjects lived: classics, forgotten treatises, learned tomes, and pulp novels are mentioned in single breaths and passed between interlocutors like playing cards. References swing back and forth like punches. The Tolstoy memoir contains one of the most vivid accounts anywhere of the physicality of literary conversation, the atmosphere of toughness and prowess, the insults, the writers' comparisons of each other to bewitching women, the emphasis on work and perfection of technique, the cultivation of style and personality. The conversations between Tolstoy, Gorky, Chekhov, and their friend L. A. Sulerzhitsky, each competing for the affection of Lev Nikolaevich, read like a mixture of a boxing match, a tea party, the judgment of Paris, and a pilgrimage to an enlightened and

Gorky and Lenin, 1920

damaged hermit. Chekhov plays Jacob to Gorky's Esau, but he requires no fur on his arms to gain the patriarch's blessing: it is his smoothness—"like a young lady!"—that Tolstoy secretly prefers.

Tolstoy appears in the memoir as a Russian god who "sits on a throne of maple under a golden lime tree"; a wizard; a satyr with the mouth of a sailor; Sviatogor, whose name means "sacred mountain," the Russian hero whom the earth itself could not hold; a force of nature. Once, in the Crimea, Gorky saw him walking along the edge of the seashore:

> And suddenly, for one mad moment, I felt that he might be about to stand up and wave his arm, and that the sea would grow calm and glassy, and the rocks would move and begin to shout, and everything around would stir and come to life and start talking in different voices about itself, and about him, and against him. I cannot put into words what I felt then; I was filled both with rapture and with horror, and then everything came together in one happy thought:
>
> "I am not an orphan on the earth so long as this man is alive."

Whereas Tolstoy's work, especially *War and Peace*, is shot through with protest against the idea of the "great man," Gorky's life and work record an ongoing search for just such a figure—a "Man with a capital M," as he called Lenin. "I think that such men are possible only in Russia," Gorky wrote, "whose history and way of life always remind me of Sodom and Gomorrah." In his literary portraits, Gorky is so drawn to his subjects that his admiration at times verges on chameleonic impersonation. In one uncanny photograph from 1920, Lenin stands in front while the much taller Gorky, in an identical suit and with his head shaved, leans diffidently to one side behind his idol, like an uncertain, elongated mirror image. The scene is right out of *Zelig*—Gorky the remora, the parrot, the perpetual acolyte.

He found his first hero in Tolstoy, and then hoped to find an alternative in, of all people, Mark Twain (who invited him to a banquet in New York and then dropped him because Gorky, on a fund-raising mission for the Bolsheviks, crossed the Atlantic in 1906 with a woman who was not his wife); and later found an even more beguiling one in Lenin; and lost his will altogether before Stalin, who badgered him to write his biography (Gorky never did) and lured Gorky back to Russia with the promise that Gorky, too, would be recognized as a great man.

Gorky sought a man with a "living faith," but in Tolstoy he settled, ironically, on the embodiment of possibly the greatest spiritual crisis of the age. Tolstoy sought the simple truthfulness of the peasantry, and instead met the eyes of a proletarian revolutionary lighting up at a usable idea. Each mistook the other for the mascot of his cause. Considering Tolstoy's view of Western influence upon

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Russia, Gorky observed that "the culminating figure of our history . . . wished (both consciously and unconsciously) to lie like a mountain across the road that leads to Europe, to that active life which demands of men the utmost concentration of all their spiritual powers." Tolstoy stands for the "Old Russia" that the revolution would leave behind; but still he offered something without which it could not succeed.

When Gorky published his memoir of Tolstoy in 1919, at the height of the Russian Civil War, he must have been thinking of Lenin. (It would be useful to have a translation by Fanger of Gorky's memoir of Lenin, which in its controversial original version—never translated in full—contains Lenin's praise of Trotsky and Gorky's comment about Sodom and Gomorrah quoted above, along with bitter remarks on the Russian peasantry.) Immediately following the Revolution, Gorky became the most prominent source of internal criticism of the Bolshevik government's methods and ideology. He published articles ferociously attacking Lenin and the authorities for their brutality, arbitrary violence, double-dealing, and hard-headed disregard for Russia's intelligentsia. The Russian Revolution had no greater believer than Gorky, and he believed it could go another way. The way it actually went was nothing like the way he dreamt it.

Shklovsky called Gorky the "Noah of the Russian intelligentsia." He formed committees to provide work and shelter for Russia's threatened poets and scholars, composing hundreds of letters of recommendation, and swore into the phone at Lenin. He secured ration tickets by claiming all writers as members of his family, suddenly boasting dozens of siblings, children, and wives. Most notable among his ventures was the World Literature Publishing House, which set out to translate into Russian the world's literary classics for "the new Soviet reader." Sitting in his office, Gorky discussed the best translator for *Gilgamesh* while sporadic gunfire erupted in the streets.

A subsection of his enterprise, the Committee for Historical Representation, would produce plays based on every great event in human history. When Alexander Blok, one of the great poets of the age, read his play on the life of the Pharaoh Ramses, Gorky suddenly remarked, "You should do it a little like this," and stretched out his arms to the sides like an ancient Egyptian. There was also the Studio for Literary Translation, the House of Scholars, the Expert Commission for the Preservation of National Objects, and so on. (It is worth noting that in Kafka's *The Trial*, the only communal activity in which Joseph K. participates is the Society for the Preservation of Municipal Monuments of Art.)

Evgeny Zamyatin, the author of the dystopian science-fiction novel *We*, which appeared in 1921, imagined the World Literature venture as a spaceship on an interplanetary mission which, after an accident, began to fall, though it would be a year and a half before the vessel actually crashed. Wondering how the voyagers would behave, Zamyatin pitched the story to Gorky, who responded: "Within a week, as if nothing had happened, they will start shaving and writing books and in general acting as if they had at least another twenty years to live.... We've got to believe that we won't be shattered, otherwise all is lost."

Gorky's decision to leave Russia in 1921 was most likely made because of his extreme disillusionment with the Soviet government—Blok had died from scurvy, exhaustion, and spiritual despair; another poet was executed for supposedly participating in a conspiracy. He was also repeatedly encouraged to leave by Lenin, who claimed that Gorky's weak lungs needed a rest. Gorky was furious with Lenin, whom he denounced as a theoretician who "carried out a planetary experiment" that failed. He was deeply exercised by the condition of Russia, which was experiencing a catastrophic famine. After three years traveling Europe, raising money for famine relief, Gorky moved to a villa in Sorrento with a view of Mt. Vesuvius, where he lived for almost ten years before returning permanently to Russia. While in exile, Gorky remembered a scene from his days with Tolstoy:

> Leo Tolstoy once asked a lizard in a low voice:
>
> "Are you happy, eh?"
>
> The lizard was sunning itself on a rock in the bushes along the road to Diulber, and Tolstoy stood facing it with his hands stuck into his leather belt. And looking around carefully, that great man confessed to the lizard:
>
> "*I'm not . . .*"

(Heinrich Heine, whom Blok was translating for the World Literature Publishing House, wrote in one of his Italian travel sketches that the lizards on a certain hillside had reported that the stones expected God to manifest Himself among them in the form of a stone.)

Where was the revolution, with its elemental image of man in search of meaning? One source records that, in Italy, Gorky received thirteen thousand letters from Russia. But what sorts of letters was he getting? According to the KGB archives, many of them were from Soviet citizens detailing the injustices and the absurdities of Russian life. Convincing himself that Russia was nonetheless on the right track, Gorky chose not to focus on their warnings.

Like Tolstoy, Gorky appears to have experienced during his exile a spiritual turning point that impelled him to take a false position. But whereas Tolstoy's crisis demanded that he disown his past life as harmfully misdirected, Gorky's crisis forced him to act as though his past actions, and the revolution as a whole, had been right. What was at stake was Gorky's place in the narrative that he had spent his life constructing: if the revolution had been a failure, his role as its prophet and its bard would be meaningless, or worse.

Gorky's return to Russia was marked by a fury of re-naming in his honor, at the suggestion of Stalin. The main street, the central park, and the Literary Institute in Moscow as well as the Art Theater; the city and region of Nizhni Novgorod; hundreds of collective farms, factories, and schools—all took Gorky's name. He was given an Art Deco mansion and estates outside Moscow and in the Crimea. In 1932, an airplane named *Maxim Gorky*, which boasted the widest wingspan in the world, flew over Moscow in a tribute to him. (The plane crashed the following year.) By the end of his life, Gorky's remarkable talent for remembering the names of places was no longer necessary: every place he went was named "Gorky."

And so Gorky became the single most prominent apologist for Stalin's regime. During the drive toward collectivization, which resulted in the deaths of millions of peasants, he provided a slogan for the authorities' struggle against the kulaks: "If the enemy does not surrender, he must be exterminated." Perhaps most notoriously, he led an expedition of writers to the site of the White Sea Canal, the first grand-scale construction project completed by the labor of convicts in the Gulag, during which more than ten thousand prisoners died. Gorky edited and contributed to an anthology praising the work for its ambition and its successful rehabilitation of criminals. The scholar John Freccero has pointed out that Dante's Inferno resembles a prison camp. Returning from Hell, Gorky told the world that it was only Purgatory.



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And yet, at the same time, Gorky continued to write letters to the secret police for "the release of prisoners or leniency in punishments." He appears to have been kept under a stultifying house arrest in "the country of the pharaohs." Observers noted that he barely touched the food at the banquets in his mansion. At the end of his life, Gorky, the great believer in positive literature, was given specially printed newspapers with "the necessary cuts and alterations." Just before he died, he proposed that one hundred writers should be mobilized for a new project:

> All world literature and history, the history of the church and philosophy must be rewritten: Gibbon and Goldoni, Bishop Irenaeus and Corneille, Professor Anfilonov and Julian the Apostate, Hesiod and Ivan Volnov, Lucretius and Zola, *Gilgamesh* and *Hiawatha*, Swift and Plutarch. The entire series must end with oral legends about Lenin.

The project was typical of Gorky—the variety of reading, the love of collective work, the certainty that the answer can be found in books, the fanaticism for correction. The taste *was* bitter.

Tolstoy found that the truth was a leveler that cut across every aspect of life, leaving the same inhospitable wilderness of death and suffering. This revelation jarred him, and his "teachings" were constructed and preached in an effort to regenerate his own faith. Yet his faith in himself was always vast. He was a great man and he knew it. His attitude toward the truth never really wavered, but he could not bring himself to face completely the consequences of his search for it. Women reminded him of death, and he hated them for it.

Gorky, by contrast, felt extreme pity for mankind, but he seems to have been pursued by the suspicion that the fight was fixed, that the smart money was on the world and on suffering. What Fanger's book strikingly shows is the extent to which other writers had Gorky's number, even early on. During the Russian Civil War, Blok, on the steps of World Literature Publishing, had told Gorky, "We have become too clever to believe in God, yet not strong enough to believe in ourselves. As a basis for life and faith there is only God or oneself. Humanity? Can anyone really believe in the reasonableness of humanity after the last war, with new, inevitable, and crueler wars in the offing?"

But Gorky put his faith in humanity. And he embellished and polished humanity so as to keep his faith in it secure. "You always want to paint over all the nicks and cracks with your own paint," Tolstoy told Gorky. Like Tolstoy, Gorky was unable to face life as he suspected it to be, but he lacked the belief in his own powers that kept Tolstoy from committing any real self-betrayal. Gorky's terror at powerlessness was so strong that in the end he favored cruelty itself to the acknowledgment of cruelty. He appears to have believed that from where he stood, down in the "lower depths," there was nowhere to go but up, and that people needed to be convinced to strive to this end. Any repression would be temporary. Always the believer in revision, Gorky treated Russia like a young writer who needed only to be further edited and encouraged. He was wrong: there was an even lower depth. His need to adorn life caused him to side with those who, for their own purposes, wanted to show it as better than it was. The corrected manuscript metamorphosed into the correctional facility.

And yet the Tolstoy memoir is so strange and moving that it is hard to comprehend completely what followed. It is a great work (Gorky never approached its quality before it or afterward), but it is not a *modern* work; and it is misleading to class Gorky among the ironic prophets of the twentieth century, when he was in


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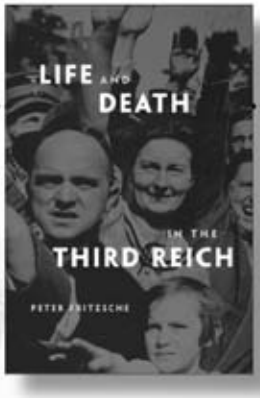


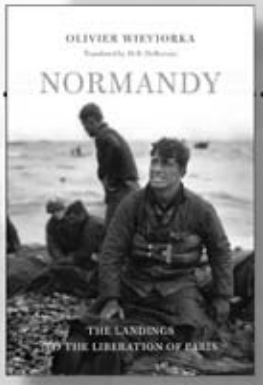


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many ways a nineteenth-century writer who lived on into the next awful age. The memoir is utterly lacking in irony. Two elements appear to have misled its readers. The first is its subject: Tolstoy himself comes off as the massive, tormented precursor of modern man—a Moses of the Modern who peers into the promised land but does not enter it. Readers seem to have taken this to mean that Gorky was modern, too, when in fact the whole piece could be read as his attempt at exchanging one certainty (religion) for another (the collective faith in Man). The second is its open-ended, fragmented form, which looks not only modern but even modernist. For Gorky, however, this form was conceived not in a modernist spirit, out of experimentation and irony, but rather out of necessity. When he writes that he cannot finish his letter, he means it: he actually could not finish it. For us, however, there can be only modern writing. We have lost the ability to write with Gorky's certainty, or even to read him with certainty. Where Gorky saw a bridge, we see a chasm.

There was certainly a sense of the Promethean in Gorky's hopes for the Russian Revolution. Man would acquire for himself aspects of the gods and gradually replace them, in this way eliminating all suffering and chaos. Kafka himself retold the story of Prometheus, dividing it into four legends. In the first, Prometheus was chained to the Caucasus for betraying the gods to men, and eagles fed off his liver, which perpetually grew back; in the second, Prometheus pressed himself deeper and deeper into the rock to escape the beaks, and became one with the rock; in the third, the betrayal was forgotten by the gods, the eagles, and by Prometheus himself; in the fourth, the gods and the eagles became tired of the meaningless story, and the wound closed wearily. Finally, Kafka concluded, "there remained the inexplicable mountains of rock." So, too, in the story of Gorky, we are left with rock: the rock of the hero Sviatogor, the "sacred mountain"; the rock of Tolstoy stretching himself like a mountain range; the rock of Vesuvius, seen from the Sorrento villa; the rock of the White Sea Canal; the mysterious rock of the individual; and the sight of a mountain that makes us imagine moving it, being negated by it, recreating it. ◆

## Peter N. Miller
# THE BIG PICTURE

**FRAMING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES: EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN, 400–800**
By Chris Wickham
(Oxford University Press, 990 pp., $50)

**ORIGINS OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMY: COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMERCE AD 300-900**
By Michael McCormick
(Cambridge University Press, 1,130 pp., $72)

### I.

A few years ago, I hitchhiked from the Benedictine monastery of Monte Oliveto, southeast of Siena, across rolling, forested, and sometimes craggy hills to the medieval hamlet of Amorosa, near the railway spur of Sinalunga. Waiting for the few passing cars left ample time to read the landscape all around me. A single glance took in lone farmhouses perched on hilltops, either falling apart or being renovated for German holidaymakers, and castles with or without houses sheltering in their lee, and larger towns whose later growth had long since obscured their earlier castellated cores. And within that single vista there unfolded the history of the late Roman and early medieval landscape: villas abandoned, then recovered, then transformed into fortified castles, which served first as magnets for the defenseless and then—depending on various other circumstances—turned into towns.

So far as we know, Adam Smith never walked these hills, but the third book of *The Wealth of Nations*—the core of his historical vision—is devoted precisely to the transformation of the late antique landscape. Unlike his contemporary Edward Gibbon, the bulk of whose *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* deals with the same period, Smith's focus was on the "rebound," on how the rudiments of the modern "Progress of Opulence in Different Nations" could be located in those centuries spanning the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of what he called modern—and we call medieval—Europe. Smith tries to explain the "unnatural and retrograde order" that drove the rise of modern Europe, namely the pre-eminence not of local bulk trade, but of the long-distance pursuit of high-margin luxury goods. He then reconstructs the consequences of this trade in "trinkets and baubles" for the rise of towns, the wealth of the countryside, and the eventual limitation of aristocratic power. The cities of Italy, he wrote, "seem to have been the first in Europe which were raised by commerce to any considerable degree of opulence."

A century later Max Weber called his study of the same phenomenon *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*. And, also like Smith, he was fascinated by the problem of the end of the Roman world, which he pinned to the collapse of cities hastened by a demographic crisis, fiscal blundering, and the severing of reciprocal commerce with the countryside. But to Smith's particular brilliance Weber added his own: a commitment to comparison that led him to examine the agrarian cultures not just of the Roman Empire, but also of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, Greece, the Hellenistic East, and the Roman Republic. As he wrote in a letter to a narrow-minded political historian, "Some may well sneer, 'Dilettantes compare.'" (That same historian had the chutzpah to call Jacob Burckhardt a dilettante.) As Weber patiently explained, comparing a chosen phenomenon with its parallels was the only way to ensure that one person's exception was not another's commonplace. Moreover, Weber wrote, the purpose of comparison was not to "lump," but to "split": "to identify and define the individuality of each development, the characteristics which made the one conclude in a manner so different from that of the other."

And now, a century later still, a third monumental book tackles the "social causes of the decline of ancient civilization" (the title of another of Weber's essays). Chris Wickham's thousand-page page-turner—and, really, how many of those are there?—puts towns and countries, peasants and aristocrats, at its center, too. Wickham is a professor of medieval history at Oxford and the author of a series of notable books on twelfth-century Tuscany. In this tome he casts his net far wider, sifting evidence from the Syrian desert to the Spanish steppes, and from southern Tunisia to northern Ireland. The Mediterranean is at the core of his argument, as it was the core of the Roman

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world whose slow agony and equally slow recovery he analyzes.

This is a book and a subject with a pedigree that demands the closest attention. But when it appears only a few years after another thousand-page book on the end of the Roman world, Michael McCormick's *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300–900*, we have to ask what is going on. Why, all of a sudden, in an age of contracting academic publishing, is the early Middle Ages deemed so hot that important university presses are engaging in a new kind of escalation? And why the Mediterranean?

If there is one word to answer all this, to explain why these remarkable books are appearing now, and what they add to the classic interpretations of Smith and Weber, it is: archaeology.

## II.

The study of the material remains of the ancient world has its own long history, and by the second half of the nineteenth century it had reached maturity. A century later, however, the study of the material remains of the medieval world had hardly begun. Wickham notes that excavations have increased our knowledge in some cases a hundredfold, and that in some places this transformation is barely a decade old. What we are now witnessing, in other words, is the moment when finally there are enough pinpricks of light in the vast darkness of the past to begin seeing things. Half a century ago, Arnaldo Momigliano invoked the "hermeneutic of the antiquaries" as a key to understanding early modern European historical scholarship. Thinking about Weber in particular, he then described sociologists as their successors, as "armed antiquaries." Wickham's book marks the advent of the "hermeneutic of the archaeologists," perhaps the armed humanists of our own time.

Archaeology is front and center in Wickham's book. Quite literally: the cover is a photograph of one of the seven hundred deserted villages on the Limestone Massif between Aleppo and Antioch. Wickham describes these villages, and others in southern Syria and the northwestern Negev in Israel, as "arguably the most significant monuments to the late Roman world surviving anywhere, for they are monuments to the peasant majority, not to rich but atypical elites."

ANTHONY RUSSO

And that is the second great effect of archaeology: it takes us beyond the people privileged by and privileging texts, to the great masses who have preceded us on this planet. Ranke's famous "history as it really was" is shifted, with the archaeologist's brush and trowel, away from political history and toward social history. The new detail that Wickham is able to command is dazzling. In this book we encounter real comparison—one that lives up not just to Weber's privately expressed credo, but also to Marc Bloch's much more famous call for a new kind of history.

Wickham's themes are big and clear: the fate of fiscality, aristocratic consumption, peasant life, and cultural geography. Analyzing how they interact in different places over time is Wickham's project in this amazing book; and having done so, he can then "reframe" how we think about the early Middle Ages. "Fiscality," simply put, means the ability to extract cash from dependents through taxes. It is one of the clearest marks of sophisticated political organization. In the ancient world, the Romans had it, but the Parthians and Carthaginians did not. Indeed, the late empire was united by its tax system: money flowing for the armies, capital cities, and civil administration. As with the railroads of the American West or the age-old routes over the Alpine passes, studying what Wickham arrestingly calls the "fiscal spine" is a matter of following the money. As he points out, its key articulation in the late Roman world connected the provinces of Africa and Byzacea (modern Tunisia) with Italy through Sicily. Along this axis traveled the capital's grain supplies and taxes; on it was based naval deployments; and along its trail were scattered the major senatorial—read: hyper-rich—landholdings. If the empire's gain was the aristocracy's, its collapse likewise anticipated their own. And, indeed, we cannot trace a single senatorial family beyond the year 600 C.E.; they and their wealth went down with the ship of state.

The West was stable in 400 C.E. Even in 500 and 600, the "Romano-Germanic" successor states were trying to stay Roman. But by 800 they had become unrecognizable to any self-respecting Roman of earlier days. Wickham suggests that in the post-Roman West the Merovingian switch from taxation and a money economy to landed wealth marked the tipping point. The contrast with the East—the surviving Roman Empire—is striking. For there, though the Persian and Arab invasions of the seventh century destroyed the old administrative structure, the state survived because taxation survived. And the province of the old Roman East that survived best, even into the first centuries of the Islamic era, was the one in which the fiscal structure changed least: Egypt. Huge papyrus archives uncovered in village digs reveal the workings of a late Roman fiscal system. But taxes can be collected only if officials are adequately informed, and information about wealth can be gathered only by constant prying effort. And so taxation not only yields more wealth, but in its functioning serves to hold the state together. Hence Wickham's conclusion that Byzantium at its nadir was more cohesive than Visigothic Spain at its most powerful.

If the state as consumer—that is, the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean—drove the ancient economy, then its collapse shifted the entire burden onto its richest individuals. Hence Wickham's focus on aristocratic consumption. He first observes that the imperial senatorial lifestyle was "unique in the preindustrial world, with the sole exception of China, in that it was civilian." After 500, this changed. The old cultural markers—*otium cum dignitate*, togas and villa life—disappear. Now the military garb of the empire—long tunic and cloak, heavy belt, and trousers—becomes the fashionable look for the secular aristocrats of the eighth century. This coincides with what Wickham suggests was the single biggest form of aristocratic consumption in the seventh and eighth centuries, even bigger than the amounts spent on church foundations or bejeweled clothing: private armies. Instead of a "crisis of the aristocracy," Wickham would have us speak of the "militarization of aristocratic lifestyles."

What real continuities there were lay at the level of city-based ownership. But here, too, "identity" was changing. Municipal politics shifted to informal patronage networks: less traditional, soon less civilian, and increasingly clerical. Consumption patterns changed dramatically as well. Just as exchange benefits those who have the most to exchange, the breakdown of exchange hurts those most involved in it.

A military aristocracy based on landed wealth looks a lot like a caricature, or a foretaste, of feudalism. But it is true—at least in 700—only for northern France. Comparison complicates things. For in Italy, war with the Goths (535–554) and the Lombards (586–589) devastated the elites. Those who survived were much poorer, and substantially stripped of



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their landholdings. By 600, Italian elites were mostly city-based, their power structures built into those of the city. Now, instead of a recklessly anachronistic leap forward to feudalism, we might just as easily see Smith's communes beginning their inexorable rise already in the seventh century.

What was left of the Byzantine Empire after the Arabs had taken a bite out of it looked different again. Here, with a new system of cantoning troops, aristocratic life shifted from the old Roman cities to the new administrative departments (*themes*). Only the great capital city of Constantinople preserved any kind of civilian hierarchy. But here too, as in France and Italy, we can trace none of the great late antique families all the way to the threshold of the early seventh century, and only from the eighth do we see emergence of those new ones that would dominate the later Byzantine world. Indeed, we know that when these new eighth-century Byzantines walked their city, its Roman past—inscriptions, monuments, buildings—seemed to them like the traces of another people. Wickham relies heavily—and supremely intelligently—on ceramic data, long a key for archaeologists, skillfully showing how much historians can benefit from close attention to the chemical composition, style, and use of pottery. The disappearance or diminishment of imported ceramicware, or the decrease in its sophistication, or the shift to lower-grade production techniques or from commercial manufacture to the domestic handmade—all these are information-laden markers to the archaeologically minded historian.

The archaeology of the European countryside also documents the fate of the late Roman aristocracy. This is the site of Wickham's most revelatory scholarship. He aims at nothing less than recovering an entire lost history of the late Roman world: the "peasant mode" economy and the autonomous life of the majority of late Romans. In these discussions Wickham draws heavily on the other cultural sciences, sociology and anthropology. If the Melanesian "headman" helps him to explain the structure of Danish village life, it is Weber's use of the "ideal type" that helps him boldly go where the material evidence trails off into the mists of time.

In a tour de force, Wickham compares village life and structures in Lucca, the Middle Rhineland, the area around Paris, Ankara, and Aphrodito in Upper Egypt. But breathtaking in its audacity is his in-depth description of the lowland village of "Malling." For beyond the archaeological detail, and the attention to social structure as it changed over time, and in addition to the comparison of this village with variant development paths taken by neighboring ones, there is the blunt fact, owned at the start by the author, that Malling did not exist. In this amazing tribute to Weber, Wickham has engaged in "a hypothetical reconstruction of a village society," doing what only someone with complete mastery of the terrain could dare. And then, as if not satisfied by his performance, Wickham turns around and uses Malling as a point of reference for analyzing real southern European villages!

This kind of attempt to reconstruct the "logic of peasant economies" is explicitly presented by Wickham as a practice of "model-building." The "peasant mode of production" emerges as an answer to the question about what would have happened if peasants did not have to give a surplus to aristocrats because aristocracies had so weakened in the general "involution and abatement of the Roman Empire" (as Wickham might rephrase Gibbon's famous title). His answer, spun out over dozens of pages, is that in the absence of external coercion, people would work less, production would decline, technological innovation would be stifled, and family size would shrink to accommodate lowered food resources. And, of course, in the absence of demand, the quality of goods produced would also sink. This theoretical model, Wickham reports, is exactly what we find in the ground.

Why does this matter? Because the relative balance of power between aristocrats and villagers had a direct impact on the social and political structures that followed. Thus, compared with France, "aristocratic domination was never as complete in Italy; landowners were not so large-scale, peasant owners were more common, there was more of a need for negotiation and mediation." Here we are again, back to the contrasting twelfth centuries of France and Italy: feudalism and the rise of the communes.

As even this superficial account makes clear, Wickham is always alert to the micro-regional reality of the late Roman world. Whether he is talking about the vicissitudes of the peasant-aristocrat balance, or the survival of Roman toponyms, or centuriated field systems, or demand clusters, he never forgets that there was no Europe in this period, and no nations—that a strong man's writ often ran only as far as his eye could see, his voice could carry, or his hand could reach. The fracturing of a common reality was visible on the ground in places such as the countryside northeast of Siena, where fifteen hundred years ago villas gave way to simple, randomly placed, isolated houses scattered across hill slopes; no settlement hierarchy; and ceramic "simplification." Yet just a few miles away, north and west of Siena, we are told, there was much more activity, more hierarchy, more sophistication.

Wickham's commitment to micro-regionalism is really a commitment to cultural geography, to the way in which human activity—*cultura* in the original sense—interacts with space. We see this in Wickham's treatment of the countryside, but it is equally true of his examination of urban life. Here changing fortunes could be localized as changes in political structures, in the location of aristocratic lodging within these cities and in their changing spatial organization. When city government collapsed, the maintenance of public amenities ceased. Some of this burden was taken over by bishops, but not all. When, on top of this, position in the state became more important than informal urban status, then urbanism was at risk (as it was in the Byzantine heartland).

On the other hand, Wickham argues that recent digging into late Byzantine and early Umayyad Syria suggests that this whole narrative may be misplaced. It raises the question about what constitutes abandonment, when the ceremonial space is not abandoned but rather re-zoned for industrial use. Is this decline? Or does it reflect a different set of cultural priorities? If the Arabs felt a need not for open monumental space but for shops, is this a "demonumentalization" or actually a sign of urban vitality? Is there, in fact, a different set of urban ambitions that need to be imagined, at least for the Islamic part of the late Roman world? (Ibn Khaldun, though, was less reticent about speaking in terms of "decline," and he, also contemplating the end of an ancient world—in his case the Arab Islamic dynasties that collapsed under Turkic attack just beyond Wickham's time horizon—had no compunction about identifying it with the fall of cities and their luxurious high cultures.)

Geography is culture in another concrete way, too. The public traffic along the "tax spine" between Africa and Rome also subsidized private trade. Wickham reports that in the Crypta Balbi in Rome—a fantastic new museum devoted to the transformation of a single space from late antiquity to the Middle Ages—100,000 potsherds were found, 47 percent of



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which were amphorae used for commerce and that nearly half of these were African Red Slip, the Crate and Barrel of the Roman world. But after the final severing of this spine in 698 and the breaking of the Mediterranean in two, African Red Slip pots ceased to flow north, and one of the great artisanal traditions of the ancient world disappeared forever.

Long-distance trade depended upon the strength of the fiscal system. With it gone, this trade collapsed. Regional trade, which was all that was left, in turn depended on the strength of the aristocratic elite. Where this disappeared we get fifth-century Britain, sixth-century Ireland, or seventh-century Spain. In Wickham's story, the bigger your exposure to the long-distance imperial trade, the harder you fell when it disappeared. If northern France nevertheless emerged as powerful, that was because its concentration of landed wealth was almost enough to offset the end of the fiscal system. Similarly, the survival of late Roman Egypt was a function of the survival of its fiscal system, whose intensity was almost enough to compensate for the absence of a concentration of landed wealth. And, of course, Egypt had the Nile, which did for it what the Mediterranean did for the Roman Empire.

In the early Middle Ages, it was micro-demand that primed the pump. As Wickham writes, "The typical city in our period, in 800 as much as 400, and indeed up to the Industrial Revolution, was a focus for the surplus from *local* landowning, *local* aristocratic demand, *local* production, *local* markets for country-dwellers, and *local* political/administrative organization." Wickham's "typical" is intended to exclude from consideration Venice, Marseille, Amalfi, and the North Sea entrepôts that connected the Vikings with the East. In other words, Wickham is trying to leverage his thousand pages of fantastic research to overturn a two-century identification of what is distinctly *European* in European history with the "unnatural and retrograde order" created by long-distance trade. In the end, it is Wickham versus Adam Smith.

## III.

Adam Smith's proxy in this fight is the great historian Henri Pirenne, who worked on the history of Belgium, of medieval cities, and, most famously, in *Mohammed and Charlemagne* in 1937, on the question of when, exactly, the ancient world ended. Pirenne argued that it was the severing of the Mediterranean by the Arab armies in the seventh and eighth centuries that cut off the eastern supplies of gold, papyrus, olive oil, and spices that preserved what was still, in the sixth century, the Western Roman Empire in all but name. The financial and cultural impoverishment that followed transformed Europe, with landed wealth replacing gold and even silver, and the Carolingian North turning its back on the shores that once nourished what passed for civilization. At the heart of his argument was the documentary record of the presence and then the disappearance of those long-distance luxuries.

And so when Wickham rejects luxuries as peripheral to societies—"because I am here interested above all in systems, I shall not spend much space analyzing luxuries as a category"—he is trying to get out from under Pirenne's very long shadow. For him, it is the bulk trade—the trade in goods that are essential to the survival of the many, not the adornment of the few—that is history. "Historians who focus their attention on luxuries," he writes with more edge than anywhere else in the book, "are mostly not writing economic history at all." If medievalists have emphasized the luxury trade, we are told, it is because they have paid too

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much attention to documents and not enough to pots, and because of "the mercantilist romanticism of Venetian galleys plowing the seas, and of wharves loaded with bales of cloth."

"Pirenne right or wrong?" is ultimately a less interesting game than recognizing Pirenne as the model for the radically new kind of history launched in his image by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in the 1920s. They all viewed "economy" as another way of getting at the whole. Pirenne, like his model Karl Lamprecht, followed Burckhardt in looking beyond politics for historical meaning, but rejected the latter's "high" cultural history for the former's material grounding. This vision of "economic history as cultural history" dominated until the 1950s, when Febvre's protégé Fernand Braudel turned to social science, creating a new ideal: "social history as cultural history."

One of the amazing things about Braudel's classic *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949) is its breadth, stretched in unexpected ways from Timbuktu to the Gobi desert. One of the shocking things about it is the complete absence from it of individual people. Like those early photographs whose exposures were so long that individual people moving through the frame actually disappeared, Braudel's view is so long that people leave no trace in its pages.

Something that Braudel's early readers all noted—this was before his legend stifled any critical evaluation—was that the whole did not cohere. The geological and geographical gigantism pulled in so many different directions at the same time that the best one could say about the whole was that it offered a series of fantastically precise but disconnected descriptions of aspects of life in the Mediterranean world. Like the pointillism of Seurat or Signac, there was precision and clarity, but what made it work as a whole was juxtaposition, not seamlessness.

What micro-histories give up in scope, they give back in depth. Readers of Carlo Ginzburg or Natalie Zemon Davis happily make this trade-off. But what are we to make of one thousand pages of micro-histories? Chris Wickham, to his credit, is aware of the problem. "The resolutely regional focus of these brief characterizations precludes synthesis and comparison: even the Roman Empire almost vanishes from sight as a single unit as a result, and so does the crucial issue of the impact on different regions of the breakdown in Mediterranean unity." And yet what we get instead, the "framing" of the title, is so general that one has to wonder at the extraordinary effort and skill that has gone into proving almost everything we already knew about the late Roman world but could not formulate concisely: its fiscal structures simplified, its aristocracies weakened, its peasantries more autonomous, old leading families were replaced by new ones, regional divergence became dramatic, and local life commensurately more fluid—and, above all, all of the developments were generated by the end of the unity that the Roman Empire imposed on the physical space from the Persian Gulf to the Irish Sea.

With so much detail brought to bear to support such general observations, one is put mordantly in mind of Schopenhauer's observation that "to seize the essence of history it suffices to compare Herodotus and the morning newspaper." In the beginning, there is the end of the ancient world and the beginning of the modern; at the end, there is the bewildering centrifugalness of "micro-regional" detail. Getting from one to the other still seems to require taking the broad, featureless superhighway, and increasing the number of its lanes does not really make it a more interesting ride.

Wickham may well represent the perfect form of "social history as cultural history." In so doing, though, he has brought us to the coal face: up against the limitations of this kind of history. Momigliano once wrote that the union of structural and narrative approaches to the study of the past sometimes seemed inevitable but it never actually happened. It may be possible now, with Wickham before us, to understand why. And Wickham even gives us a clue. Reflecting on the differences between regions, he concludes that they "seem best explained through differences in the behavior of aristocrats." And how is *this* to be explained? Now we are in a place where social science cannot help us, where Braudel himself never dared to go, and where Wickham, for all his boldness, does not go either: where, as William James wrote, "the trail of the human serpent is over all." It is the impossibility of accommodating the reality of concrete individuals into a structural or social scientific perspective that explains why Momigliano's two modes of the antiquarian and the historical never blended, and why Braudel could never get his three layers of geological, economic, and human time to converge in the life of anyone, even the ruler of half the globe.

It is, then, perhaps the supreme achievement of Wickham's remarkable book to reveal exactly how and where its reach may have exceeded its grasp.

## Versions of a Miserabilist

One thought, from over the river: the mosquitoes
lost the smell of blood in me half way across.

Old Eden verity—I am no more to blame for my death
than I was for the sleazy rendezvous of my birth.

God alters selfish men—now that they have no face,
he has them regard the face, he teaches them how

they should have lived in a universe whose every centre is
a little pot of self-regard, a little like yours.

*

This is the end of money, though we have black fingers;
this the seedy afterlife of things. Everything poised,

as if the next step were already on stand-by:
like a star in the cavity the pilot light keeps

the steady job of incremental burning.
The meter wheel spins round and round towards

the astronomical bill that will never be paid.
These are your concerns. The fridge, my symbol,

persists in its puddle and on-off fugue. Just when
you think it is finally dead, it rambles to life.

**TIM LIARDET**



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Braudel's *Mediterranean* has for a half-century been hailed as the great demonstration piece of twentieth-century historical scholarship. As its direct heir, both in terms of its geography and aspirations, Wickham's *Framing the Early Middle Ages* may be the last great historical work of the last century. Yet the problem of that squirming, evasive human serpent remains.

Yet there is another historian's Mediterranean that we can consider—just as gigantic, but in which individual lives provide a common unit of measurement for both micro-history and macro-framework. This is *A Mediterranean Society*, S. D. Goitein's five-volume study of the Islamic Mediterranean of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as reconstructed from the materials found at the end of the nineteenth century in the Cairo Geniza. (Interestingly, Goitein tells us that he did not know of Braudel's work until 1966 and did not bother to read it until it appeared in English in 1972, by which time he had already published his first volumes.)

Goitein's magnum opus—cited now and again by Wickham for evidence of how quickly economic life rebounded in North Africa—is divided into volumes on Economic Foundations, Community, Family, Daily Life, and, finally, the Individual. The probes within go as deep as the hundreds of thousands of Judeo-Arabic fragments permit. Goitein, like Wickham and Braudel, is all about detail. But he was never tempted by abstraction. And so, tellingly, Goitein changed the title of the final volume from *The Mediterranean Mind* to *The Individual: Portrait of a Mediterranean Personality of the High Middle Ages as Reflected in the Cairo Geniza*. He did this, he explained, "to avoid the erroneous impression that the personality emerging from the Geniza documents is regarded as representative of a hypothetical human type common to the Mediterranean area." No ideal types for him, then. This is a *Mediterranean* that speaks in the language of human beings.

## IV.

And so, coming back to where we began, and to the other new thousand-page study of the late antique Mediterranean, it becomes clear that it is Goitein's Mediterranean, not Braudel's, that stands behind Michael McCormick's *Origins of the European Economy*. This book—gigantic in every way—also tackles head-on the question of when and how the late Roman world ended and the "modern" one began. As with Wickham, archaeology plays a crucial role (ceramic industry and metal production), and also material culture (the movement of coins and relics), and population dynamics (diet and susceptibility to disease). But at the heart of this project are people—a detailed prosopography of 669 individuals who are documented to have travelled in the period 300–900 C.E. Out of these particularities McCormick constructs a powerful portrait of how the Mediterranean was won. Destined to replace Pirenne, this book will also carry forward Pirenne's revolution in historical method.

McCormick's book is a masterpiece of craft—of detailed readings of texts and things, of the integration of old skills such as the study of handwriting and newfangled ones such as underwater archaeology, paleo-pollution studies (a field so new there has not been time to name it), and the use of word-searchable digital databases to identify people out of place. Layering documents atop relics and slag atop pots, he not only pinpoints the nadir of East-West communication in the Mediterranean (700–725), but also shows how very brief was this interruption before the rhythm of activity revived. Nor were the complex ties between Europe and the East purely a Mediterranean affair. Mining archaeological results with aplomb, McCormick also makes full sense of the role of the Vikings as physical intermediaries between the Iraqi Abbasids, Pagan Russians, and Carolingian Christians.

Not only does McCormick never lose sight of the human, he also brings the archaeological and the human together—as in photos of thousand-year-old neck shackles, found in Bulgaria, worn by the human cargo who walked themselves over the Alps and down to Venice for shipment to the East. The wealth of Venice and Amalfi, the engines of Adam Smith's ninth-century "Progress of Opulence," derived from human trafficking. The next time any of us wanders into an early Venetian church—McCormick graphs the big uptick in eighth- and ninth-century foundations as the dinars flowed in—we should remember the Slavs who were marched down to the sea in chains to finance them.

And so Wickham may be wrong to argue, in the context of attacking Pirenne and, perhaps silently, McCormick, that "historians who focus their attention on luxuries are mostly not writing economic history at all." Actually, McCormick, like Bloch and Pirenne, is writing a different kind of economic history: "economic history as cultural history." Wickham's reasons for emphasizing the local bulk trade are noble, and they motivated the project of twentieth-century social history: getting at the conditions of the voiceless many. He may do this wonderfully well, but the price of building up a portrait of those without faces and voices is the impersonality of even the best social scientific history. If we can say that Wickham is the culmination of this strand in mid-twentieth-century historiography, we would have to conclude that McCormick has carried the best work of the early twentieth century on into the twenty-first—not just by adding more lanes, but by carving out a whole new route. And through the lens of McCormick's Mediterranean we may feel that it is Goitein's epic, and not Braudel's, that will better stand the test of time.

McCormick, like Goitein before him, reminds us that people in motion make history. When Goitein crossed the Mediterranean en route from Germany to Palestine in 1923, his fellow passenger was Gershom Scholem. When Braudel crossed the Atlantic in 1934 to take up his position at the University of São Paolo, he sailed with Claude Lévi-Strauss, on the way to his *tristes tropiques*. The first pair of travelers recovered for us whole worlds of people; the latter, whole structures of the world. In the end, human history is the story of the past that humans recognize. The sophisticated amplification devices of the modern cultural sciences—art history, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, the history of religion—have done an amazing job at stretching that horizon of recognition. But there is no replacement for the human trace, and no way to grasp its meaning without a trained imagination. The Mediterranean has indeed proved its historians, and if "the great shroud of the sea rolls on as it rolled five thousand years ago," in the last two hundred years many of its prizes have finally been brought to the surface, and many of its secrets yielded up, and the trail of that human serpent made ever more real. ◆

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## Washington Diarist

# Golden Bull

In my brief but thoughtful existence, I have permitted myself only once the confidence to coin a law of life. It is that there is no such place as rock bottom. There is a sliver of solace, I suppose, in the thought that you have not yet sunk as low as you can sink; but it also robs you of the exhilaration that there is nowhere to go but up. Whatever the emotional consequences, the law that there is no such place as rock bottom is deeply counter-intuitive: the belief that things cannot get worse is a regular feature of contemporary experience, and it is often quite plausible. In the castle of culture, certainly, it is our daily bread. Why, just some weeks ago Christopher Hitchens and his camera-ready conscience went and got themselves waterboarded for the pages of *Vanity Fair*, which are anyway torture enough. There are many things that might be said about such a stunt—that moral understanding is not arrived at by means of the senses, or by personal acquaintance with evil; that ordinary intelligence and ordinary imagination are quite sufficient to establish the foulness and the folly of such procedures, which is why judges who have not dressed up in Guantánamo drag have been able to rule persuasively against them; that the victims of waterboarding do not commonly towel down and head for the Waverly Inn—but I have no intention of dignifying this high clowning with serious reflection. I hope only that Hitchens next tries rendition.

We are living in a golden age of the pseudo-meaningful stunt. After all, the democratization of bullshit on the Internet is making it harder and harder to get noticed. The market for everything is becoming awfully crowded. And so the desperation of the hucksters is everywhere in evidence. This week's delicacy comes from Sotheby's in London, which has delivered the news that Damien Hirst has produced a golden calf. The golden calf by damien hirst headlines groundbreaking auction of work by artist, the press release screams in cerulean blue caps. It explains that "the centrepiece of the auction, *The Golden Calf*, is a monumental new sculpture: a bull in formaldehyde, whose head is crowned by a solid gold disc and whose hooves and horns are cast in 18-carat solid gold. Encased in a gold-plated stainless steel and glass box, it measures 215.4 by 320 by 137.2 cm. This exceptional work, which unites the artist's interests in science, religion, beauty, and death, is estimated to realise £8–12 million." The prose reminds me of real-estate porn; but in these straitened times art-porn is replacing real-estate porn. Some photographs of Hirst and his bovine blue bath accompany Sotheby's announcement. He appears in the uniform of the contemporary avant-garde—t-shirt and jeans, which are supposed to represent, in London as in Brooklyn, something entirely new, an invigorating youthful candor, though they are as mannered and as conventional as any of Manet's cravats—and an unintentionally hilarious look of gravity on his otherwise affectless face. In fact, he and his dead animal look rather alike. And to add to the excitement, there is a blurb from the artist's own gallery. "*Gagosian Gallery*: 'As Damien's long-term gallery, we've come to expect the unexpected. He can certainly count on us to be in the room with paddle in hand.'" Oooh, naughty.

A golden calf: it is a startling admission. The iconographical heritage is, of course, very rich. In Poussin, in Tintoretto, in Lucas van Leyden, the artistic representation of the golden calf was contrived as a denunciation of what David Freedberg, in an extraordinary book on "the power of images" many years ago, described as "the crass and cold materialism that brings forth the idol that (once fashioned) is worshipped." Indeed, the Israelites at the foot of Sinai—Moses appears in all these pictures, preparing to shatter the law in anger—were guilty of two materialisms: of the calf, which was a betrayal of their metaphysics, and of the gold, which was a betrayal of their morals. The Tintoretto painting, in his own parish church in Venice, is (with its pendant *The Last Judgment*) the tallest painting on canvas that was executed in the Renaissance—almost fifty feet of castigation. Lucas's orgiastic *Dance Round the Golden Calf*, at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, is a large triptych that was created to bring the criticism of idolatry to the forefront of the believer's, or the spectator's, consciousness; and Poussin's celebrated picture, at the National Gallery in London, is certainly the most beautiful depiction in European art of the inclination of materialism toward wantonness. If the bull won't make you forget Yahweh, the woman dancing beneath the bull will. Moreover, these pictures were produced in an era of enormous controversy, and even violence, about the spiritual legitimacy of images—in the Netherlands especially, and also in Tintoretto's Venice, where the city's tolerance of dissenting creeds provoked the painter into his colossal reiteration of the orthodox horror of blasphemy. Genuine artists cannot be iconoclasts, obviously; but there is a rumor of iconoclasm in all these works.

Hirst, you might think, is an iconoclast, since his art is designed to smash art. But this is too flattering: iconoclasm was an affair of principle. And so, too, was iconodulism. There was nothing cynical about the calf that Aaron made. But there is no ideal in Hirst; there is only a capitalist's complacence. For him, the gold is more significant than the calf. His extrusions deserve a place in economic history, not in aesthetic history. Why else ship the idol directly from the studio to the auction house? In the press release, Hirst ringingly declares that "it's a very democratic way to sell contemporary art and it feels like a natural evolution in contemporary art." It sure does. But democratic? What he means is that no hedge-fund manager should be denied a fair shot at driving up the price. The truth is that *The Golden Calf* unites the artist's interests in science, religion, beauty, and death with the artist's interest in money. Remember, the story of the golden calf is the story of a mob divinizing its gold. Remind you of Greenwich? Hirst's stunt would not be possible without the small but fevered herd of individuals whose wealth grows in inverse proportion to their taste. He soaks the bull to soak the cattle. In the sublime old joke of Paul Desmond's, this is the way the world ends, not with a whim but a banker.

*Leon Wieseltier*



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